

THE Hudson REVIEW

HERBERT GOLD:

Love and Like—a story

GEORG SIMMEL:

Two Essays: The Handle, and The Ruin

B. L. REID:

Yeats and Tragedy

JOSEPH KERMAN:

American Music: The Columbia Series

BARBARA DEMING:

Osborne's War Against the Philistines

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PARIS LETTER BY OLIVIER TODD.

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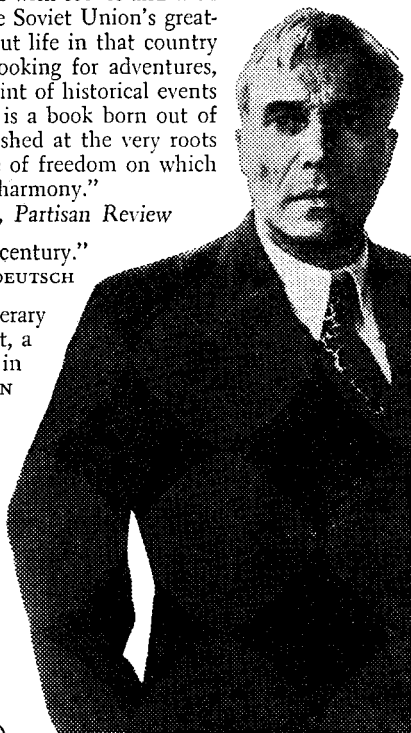
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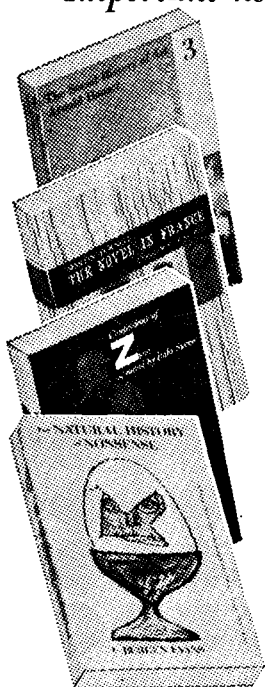
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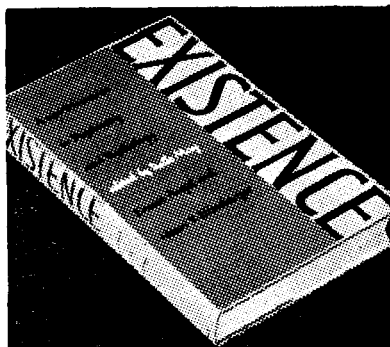
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Notes on Contributors

HERBERT GOLD'S new novel, *The Optimist*, will be published early in 1959 by Atlantic-Little, Brown.

A book of poems by W. D. SNODGRASS, *Heart's Needle*, will be published in the spring of 1959 by Knopf. Mr. Snodgrass is a Hudson Review Fellow in Poetry for 1958-59.

The two essays in this issue by GEORG SIMMEL are to appear later this year (his centenary) in a commemorative volume, *Georg Simmel, 1858-1918: A Collection of Analyses, with Translations, and a Bibliography*, edited by Kurt H. Wolff, to be published by The Ohio State University Press. "The Handle" and "The Ruin" have been translated respectively by RUDOLPH H. WEINGARTNER, of Columbia University, and DAVID KETTLER, of The Ohio State University.

HERBERT MORRIS'S poetry has appeared in a number of literary magazines.

The essay by B. L. REID in this issue is the concluding chapter of a book-length study of Yeats, as yet unpublished. Mr. Reid's *Art by Subtraction: A Dissenting Opinion of Gertrude Stein* was published this spring by the University of Oklahoma Press.

BARBARA DEMING has published poetry, stories, and theatre and film criticism in various periodicals. This is her first appearance in this Review.

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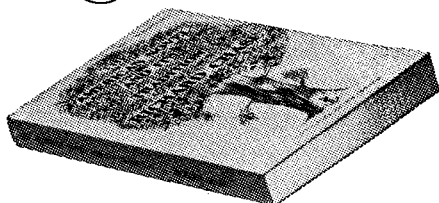
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HERBERT GOLD

Love and Like

HE GOT TO CLEVELAND rather late, telephoned his wife from the terminal, and asked if he could see their children early the next morning. She seemed easy and friendly and said sure thing, of course, why not? He sighed when they hung up and he stared at the telephone. Maybe his absence really could work to level things between them.

Why not? as she said. They had loved each other for ten years, or rather, for a part of those ten years impossible now to calculate. He remained sitting in the telephone booth. He was a young man with a thin, almost boyish body and a large head, heavily muscled at the jaw. On his face he wore the haunted, eaten look of a man whose accomplice has betrayed him. Whether his accomplice was his former wife or his conscience was not yet clear to him. Conscience was still talking to his wife: We didn't make it, kid! And he was remembering one of their last quarrels before they gave up, when he said, "We'll try! We'll try!" And paining badly with those fragments of the past, he heard again her quiet reviving words: "We'll try, darling."

If they had finally made out, it would all have been remembered as the progress and process of love; with failure it could seem all bad; he was determined to hold in retrospect to a mixed verdict—some pretty, some unpretty, and nevertheless the long Sunday afternoon habit of lovemaking spoke for a true intimacy. The hardest, most essential responsibility to a dead marriage is to preserve the ripe strength it once had. Must have had, must have! So without love now, if that's the way it was, why couldn't they simply like each other for the rest of time? Not just for the sake of the children. For the sake of themselves and what they had become through their marriage.

All this was a resolution. Done.

Then he fished for another dime in his pocket and called Sally. Okay, it was late, but wasn't she glad to hear his voice? She laughed sleepily and asked him how he could doubt it. She was sleepy was all. She had been thinking of him. All right then, dreaming. He

could come right up—would it take twenty minutes? For splashing some cold water and getting good and waked and dressed.

“Don’t bother,” he said, and even in the telephone booth, under the falsification of wires and electricity, the laughter brought her back to him with all her soft, warm childlike sleepiness amid the fragrant bedclothes. Sally’s face was devoted to laughter, especially the very blue, waiting-to-smile eyes—those eyes of a blue which could give him what a strong awakening on a morning in the country gives, courage and appetite and great belief in the future. The morning he left, she had made breakfast for him, hotcakes with butter, sweet syrup, three kinds of jam—mostly he remembered the sweetness and much melted butter. With his mouth stuffed, he shook his finger to warn her that he had something to say as soon as he could swallow.

“What’s the matter, darling?”

“Oh it’s good! It’s so good, Sally!”

And the lashes fell over the brave summersky eyes. She was timid despite her laughter’s deep abandon. “Then why do you have to leave Cleveland?” she had asked. The question cost her heavily. Without me? her paleness said. The unsmiling blue eyes were trying to force his reply: Then why don’t we . . . ?

Unspoken questions were, as always, the ones he felt he had to answer and precisely could not. Therefore he had spoken in a tone of stubborn exasperation. “Because my wife lives here. Because it’s too soon. Because I have to.” He reached across the debris of eating to touch her more gently. If he could tell her, he would. “Now, with you here, Sally, it’s all right. Right now. But I can’t tell you about my wife and what she did to me. What she does! What she still does!” he cried out abruptly. His heart was pounding and the good of the breakfast was gone. “And the children—I still can’t imagine any other life than being their father—”

She was looking at his hand on hers with a curious withdrawn attention.

He said quietly, “Maybe I just haven’t found the way to love them without loving their mother. Maybe that’s it and there is a way.”

His wife made him need Sally; if only she could free him entirely for Sally! This way, entangling him in her wrath, she hardly let him know who Sally was. He had to find her in a long history in which she had no part, past a furious, gyring woman, after outrage

and love gripping each other as do alloyed metals under heat and pressure. Let Sally make him pure—as he never was—let Sally make herself felt!

But her eyes were answering nothing, were asking him: And why can't we? He realized that she had not heard him at all. Everyone is sometimes made deaf by intentions. He might as well have been brutal: And I just don't know about you, either, dollface. Seems as how I met you someplace before.

Now he shrugged and felt the damp shirt moving on his back. Every time he said the word "wife" she should interrupt and say, "*Former* wife." Shaper to Shaper—*over*, he decided, ferociously willing it as if he were passing a message by radio and the battlefield made communication difficult: *Over!* He had just finished writing a technical manual on the care and operation of a new, improved, long-range walkie-talkie. In Cleveland he had worked for General Electric on instructions for the installation of intercoms in language any mechanic could understand; in the identical off-white New York office to which he had arranged a transfer, under the same Armstrong Cork soundproofing, with thousands of little holes conking, stunning every whisper of distraction, he had labored with a Signal Corps semantics expert on further explanations of how to keep contact open under conditions of stress. "Limited contact under conditions of vital stress" He was making mass poetry for five-stripe sergeants who don't like the word *war*. It was a career for a careful explainer. But now over to Dan Shaper, please!

Deciding: Condition of stress not total chaos if receiver flashes emergency transistor filters out static toward coded meaning (see Fig. 3). Put into heart's English. Also see resources of regret, hope, and desire for possible decoding toward good conscience.

2

At seven-thirty the next morning he was running up the stairway toward his daughters. The buzzer had admitted him; the door to the upstairs flat was open.

"Paula, honey!"

"Hello, Daddy. Mommy and Cynthia are still sleeping. I knew you were coming. I got up and took my own breakfast. Wheaties and prunes and a pickle. Mommy says I can eat what's on the

bottom shelf of the fridge and that's where the pickle was. Hello, Daddy."

Exactly what he wanted always, this time Paula was a six-year-old lady sitting on the couch. First she rang the buzzer to let him in, then she returned shyly to her place to wait for him.

"And I knew you would be coming back today because I counted the days," she said. "You said thirty. You promised." She was quivering with excitement beneath the formality with which she had vain hopes of hiding herself. A month is even longer in a child's life than in her father's. He took her in his arms and she said, "I'm glad." Her eyelashes were wet when he kissed them.

"I'm glad to see you too, honeybear."

They whispered together gravely to keep from waking the rest of the house. He felt strong in his monthlong convalescence. He forgot that he had slept only the sleep of the recently divorced, that is, no sleep but that profitless, dream-jammed one of might-have-been and exhaustion. Paula gave him her news. Not only had she lost a tooth, but also the ragged edge of the new, grownup one had begun to appear. He looked and saw. At her command he appreciated it with his finger, too. They were interrupted by another child, running scared and barefoot to join the celebration, four-year-old Cynthia. Disappointed, Paula bravely permitted Cynthia to catch up with a minute of greeting.

Then he pulled them both onto the couch beside him, still bed-warm in their summer pajamas, and so were they three sitting when his wife came out. She had heard them, stayed a long time in the bathroom, and emerged only after satisfying herself that she was sweet and alert and nice to look at. He was very much aware also of how he looked to her with the two little ones wriggling close to him.

She smiled and said, "Hello, Dan." Her hair had been cut in a new fashion and fluffed out to make a soft frame for the delicate bones of her face. Her brow, finely marked by frown lines, seemed wider now, peacefully expectant. What happens to a young woman when she divorces? Aren't her eyes puffy in the morning any more? Where does the blue lymph go? Is she no longer stringy and dismayed after the first glimpse of herself in the bathroom mirror? Not this one. Dark, slender, and cool, she was mobilized for love again.

Shaper was pleased by her greeting and—with only a twinge of self-judging jealousy—by her appearance. He put it down to his

credit that she was not ruined for the hope of love. His moving out of town had done them both good. Sally last night had started the visit auspiciously. Paula was a marvel and Cynthia a wonder. And now his wife was the decent human being he had almost always believed in.

"Yes, thanks," he said, and they all four had breakfast together, just like a family. Since the first years of their marriage, his wife had barely eaten in the morning, drinking black coffee and nibbling at dry toast and then rushing to the scales, but today she took an extra piece of toast and covered it with butter in order to show him that she could now enjoy food. Well, let her have that pleasure, he thought with a fine expansive sense of tolerance. They both watched the girls munching greedily, proving something to their parents.

Later, while the children played with their new toys, they sat together in the front room and talked, balancing coffee cups on their knees. "It's all right now," she said. "You did right to go away for a while. There were good things, weren't there, Dan?"

"I'm glad you remember."

"I do. I do." Her narrow face with its wide brow wore a complex expression—frowning, tender, at peace. They had shared and not shared. They had been satisfied, unsatisfied. She had wanted, they had both wanted another child; but (stiff white mouth and tense, silent staring out the window) she had needed a guarantee that this time it would be a boy. She had found a doctor in Miami with fantastic notions about special diets, the power of raisins and lima beans and times of the month—litmus paper, fever charts, count the days—and a husband to be applied as an agent when the alchemical and astrological signs say yes. Desperate woman! Yet a man can grow to accept a partial madness when it is the condition of the rational universe he desires. Desperate husband! (Aren't many people superstitious? When she has her son, what difference by what illusion she was comforted?) But one day he faces the obvious question: All right, there's a fifty-fifty chance, say. And if it's not a boy? Kachoo—sneezing with boredom and despair.

And if it's *not* a boy?

As always, his besetting flaw was the one of perverse hope and pride—the crazy patience of the man who needs love too much to take the necessary risk of losing it. When this danger is not challenged, love and like both are doomed. He had feared to compel his wife to follow his lead. He would not submit to being dragged

along by her frantic jittering after happiness; she could not follow his bone-tired, patience-ended assertions of will; for them it had long been too late for all but knowledge, and perhaps in love it is always too late for that. The terrible guilt which he carried with him was a hope, not an understanding: Once she might have been made to want what you want, if you had pressed hard enough, and if you had said in time, No, not that way! Follow me and come to yourself!

The enduring of wrong amounts to an acquiescence in evil, a sin of active malignance which grew on the body of their marriage like a tumor and, like a tumor, sapped its strength to proliferate in this cruel organism, divorce. When the body is dead and all health irrelevant, only then will the cancer cease. In the meantime, every joy, every lively nerve, every vein of health must supply food for the fibrillar parasite. The dying creature curses its strong heart, its tuned body, because these prolong the agony. Each motive for happiness must be bled dry.

Shaper knew that he had not acted in time.

But finally he had said *no*.

NO!

Said no to lima beans and love by astrological suggestion—and maybe, kid, you're right about wanting to see Doctor Kasdan, he's supposed to be a good one—although he believed in that cure almost as little as he believed in the efficacy of lima beans to induce suckling boy babies instead of beautiful but incomplete girls.

A nightmare. Yet this was the intelligent, accomplished woman who could charm a stick into life. Seething and plausible. She took a cigarette from the box on the record cabinet, very sure of herself, very much the fresh young divorcee, and said, "Dan, I thought about you while you were away. We both lost. . . ."

"Yes, despite everything we've lost a great deal."

"We lost *control*," she said firmly.

He felt rebuked, but it did not touch his reviving humor. Often she was bad, but sometimes she was steady and knew the way. She was right! He longed to regain this old sense of his wife's rightness. He needed it to go on from where he was.

"I don't blame you any more about that . . . that," she said. "It was wrong of me to be so . . . so"

This time he did not make the mistake of supplying her words. Perhaps she was testing him.

"So angry, nervous with you," she said. "*Judgmental*,"—one of those damn labels again, he thought, but nodded encouragingly. Warily she went on with a speech that seemed almost rehearsed. He did not expect her to grant him a confession, but he thought maybe she was making it in her own way at last and that this could finally release both of them: I was jealous, and not merely jealous, also morbid and criminal and made furious by fantasies, until you had to give me justice for them because you too demanded someone totally committed to you, because jealousy itself is an infidelity which takes a wife from her husband. . . . But she said instead (and who would she be if she used his words? her own were good enough): "I think I've learned something. We each learned, so it wasn't so bad. We probably couldn't have married anyone else, or anyone better, so why blame each other?"

"Right! We won't any more!"

She frowned and did not hear him. He felt her effort not to slip down and down into the despair which had driven him away. It had poisoned him—all that cleverness turned to making him out a monster—and it had poisoned her. Rage, like jealousy, is a fire which burns out the future: she apparently knew it, and the softness in her eyes, even this willed, desperate kindness at the door to the furnace, restored her to him as he needed her to be restored. Then they could both go on to love again, not merely beyond hatred, but also strong in a practical, difficult friendship. Perhaps that was too much to ask, his version of her romanticism, but at least it was a principle worth striving for.

"We had some good reasons together," he said.

"What? Oh! Of course! I know, I remember, Dan. It wasn't just our psychological set, we really liked each other—"

He grinned wryly. "So it seemed at the time."

She did not admit a poor effort at humor in his enforced grip on the past. "That's the way you remember it and maybe that's partly how it was. I suppose. Anyway,"—with great solemn effort for which he wanted to thank and thank and thank her—"whatever our motivations"—although he winced at the word—"we—yes—Dan—*we loved each other*."

"Yes!"

And again she retreated. "But it was sick."

"Okay," he said.

And she folded her hands contentedly. "That's what I've learned."

Who's been teaching you now? he wanted to ask. He resisted successfully. He wanted her to understand about the passive faithlessness of the woman who expects her husband to be what he is not, what no man can be, who lies with him locked in her lonely dream of perfection, who sees her real marriage by the strange sunless radiance of a dream marriage which is unaltered by growth and event, by this particular day on earth or that one. Absolutist! Idealist! Romantic! These had been his epithets for her. And you can't make yourself into Eleanor of Aquitaine and me into a troubador by nagging me for talking with a girl at a goddamn party! All right, so I didn't, didn't, *didn't* light your cigarette! So neither of our children were boys!

He managed. He said nothing.

The admissions she had just made were an extravagant yielding. She felt loss, they meant; relief and giving up pain could help to teach her to praise life, and when she could bear the din of pleasure once more, she might even be grateful to him. Together they had exorcized childish ways—the lesson was nearly fatal; they had also learned and practiced love. Once free of each other, they could go on with this lifelong music.

But how stiff she still was!

Nevertheless, in her own way, calmly, gently, and much sweeter than his secretly unleashed judgment, with but a slight stiffness of the mouth, she went on. He was impressed by her rapid peace-making, so soon after the tears and threats and furious thrashing. There was a deep quiet note of loss despite the artificial speech. He listened: "It was inevitable. You were my mistake and I was yours. But neither of us is *bad*, and we could have married really bad people, real stinkers—so if we know it was inevitable . . . Dan," she concluded rapidly, with a flush, "I said things, did things. Now I'm sorry."

She was in misery. He wanted to comfort her. Then she straightened up with a strong glance of resolution and touched her hair. "I'm sorry," she said.

"I'm sorry too, kid, for all I did wrong."

Apologies and pride and gratitude. Shaper felt a reviving flow of tenderness for her because she said *stinkers*, and maybe even thought stinkers, and not that cant of hers, *destructive personalities*. They sat

very still, in a heated blush both of them, their shame almost a courting shyness, and they listened to their children splashing in the sink and laughing. An odd music for courting. The children were his laughter and hers; her body and his were met on the children as they had been entangled in each other. All this willed and anxious sweetness between them might finally give him Sally, give her whomever she wanted, and not merely send them raging after others. It could be the final creative act of their marriage—the two of them educated by their errors, not bound to them, freed for love and not greedily clutching at it. They would always have Paula and Cynthia together.

Once, on the day when their lawyers had first met, before this resilient stupor with which he shielded himself had settled in, he had cried out in this room, after they had both put the children to bed and he was facing her, ready to say goodbye, when he was at the door with all the unfinished business of their life meeting him in her huge hot eyes: “We didn’t make it, kid.”

“We tried. We tried.”

“We tried, honey.”

And they had fallen into an adulterous passion, still unshaken in their will on divorce, the adultery made painfully sweet. He remembered it with shame, his eye suddenly prickling and aching, and saw himself again covering her with kisses, forcing her mouth open while her body bent backwards, arched, received him. She had given herself without a word, moaning, and then he had fled like a thief.

Now he was merely quiet. The ache in his eye was an unheard sound, an unseen tremor of desire.

Still they would always have the children together.

He felt the day’s heat already sweeping in and looked about for the fan. In his reticence in this familiar and very unfamiliar house, his and not his, he obeyed the stricture she had once made in anger—don’t touch anything, nothing is yours any more! (Nothing but the children.) “Put your hands on me and I’ll get an injunction,” she had said the next day. It was her only reference to that strange, silent last lovemaking. “I’ll slap a court order on you so fast it’ll make you dizzy.”

“Okay, kid, do you really think I want to touch you?” And that time his eye had not ached, not seemed invisibly swollen. It was the end. Almost comfortably he believed in playing out the rest of their

career together without the danger of intimacy. Of course he was wrong, but something of the comfort remained in his waiting, his planning, his cautious observance of the new rules of tact and courtesy. It was only the children he needed.

She had rearranged all the furniture, painted, covered, hid, and replaced, so that the house could begin anew. He recognized it as he recognized her, from a distance, from a long time, from a dream of voyages. She had planned it that way. Fastidiously he had been plucked out of her skin and the scars dusted over, so that she could say, *Who? Who?* She wanted him to notice how much he was not at home. How managerial and intelligent of her to begin briskly anew! With what a rush she had retreated from him!

He smiled at her. "You look very well, kid."

She turned and pressed her lips together tightly. In pain she had a large mouth—childbirth, bereavement—he had been there with her; anger was a small one which sent him away. By the resenting white line at the corners of her mouth, he recognized his wife, the one who had first wanted him for pride in what he did—others wanted him, he was not like the herd of college boys; then wanted him to do nothing that did not include her, that might make others covet him; and then when they were cozy in a common, including misery, rebuked and rebuked him for his failure to be her romantic ideal. O father she lost, O son I did not give her, how amply I was repaid for trying to replace you! What foolish pride that thought this abstract hungering of hers was desire for me! Impossible victories that I wanted!

Now thanks to that bloodless thin line and the stiff tremor of her response to his word for her, *kid*, he felt entirely at home. It was almost like the last years of their marriage again.

She reached for an envelope in her purse. "You forgot to pay my dental bill. It dates from before our settlement," she said with her marvelous cool telephone voice, "so of course you are responsible. Dr. Jonas' secretary called me about it and I said you had probably forgot. I said I'd give it to you personally when you got back to town."

He took the paper, put it in his pocket, and called like a drowning man, "Paula! Cynthia! Let's go outside, would you like that?"

They came screaming with pleasure into the room and he believed that, yes, he could still keep his grip on the green feelings he had brought in from his month away.

3

He liked everyone, even his wife. Perhaps he loved no one but the children—he was so diminished by the belly-ripping, face-clawing final year of marriage—but he felt a reviving and indiscriminating benevolence toward the world. Plus desire for Sally, ah, that's important! It was recovery from an illness. When he returned to his hotel after leaving the children for their afternoon nap, his thoughts wheeled around to Sally, and they were imbedded within a silly glow of sympathy for everyone, irrelevantly, from the desk clerk with sinus trouble to the Japs at Hiroshima. Symptom of convalescence. "Key, please! Hot enough for you?"

He wanted to share this precarious perch on health. Sally had agreed to drive out to Chagrin Falls and go swimming with him. The first time he took a girl swimming was important to Shaper. It's a risk and rousing. You run the challenges of dirt, ants, and fatigue; he took chances on a cold noting of his skinny body in boxer trunks, the scatter of hair and the ropes of tendons and no strong rhythm of distraction. Enjoying the happy vanity of a lovely object, long used to triumphant waiting, Sally might have an eye for some tumbling beach athlete, not Dan Shaper with his glasses and his bony knees. Admire, admire me! her every movement had been saying to him for months. He had done it well. Was that a guarantee that she would love him?

No matter, he thought as he shaved in his hotel room; I don't want love now, I couldn't take it yet, what I need is just what Sally is giving me. Why worry about categories? He remembered that warning song: "Silkless silk and milkless milk! Love oh love oh loveless love. . . ."

Fully dressed, he lay on the bed, organizing himself to meet Sally, feet straight and toes up, watching the hand of the clock move down to two. These few minutes of rest were necessary, despite his driving heart, after a morning spent with his children, seeing in their faces the intermingling of his wife and himself, feeling her breath with his gesture when they talked, his forehead with her dark, thick-lashed eyes when they laughed. Their eyes when he rolled on the floor to play bus or airplane as they had during the easy evenings of their babyhood (they remembered, they demanded it)—they wanted him to bathe them again, as he used to—and their mother's eyes, the tragic pouched eyes of the beauty unsuccessful in

love. And then the solemn politeness all around when he turned them back to her.

One minute to two! Think of Sally—fullbreasted and fullhipped, blond, frequently amused—how lucky to be all those things that his wife was not! And Sally had her own secret sources, too! He remembered the yearning of her response to his first, long-delayed kiss, when in the renewal of timidity, the return to boyishness brought on by the long illness of his marriage, he had quite simply been afraid. No, it took wisdom to be full and warm like that. Her hand on his back was deep art, her weight on his shoulder was Plato and . . . and . . . Sally, not Plato! No romantic ideal! She did it for herself and for him.

Lord, ten after two already. He must have dozed. He threw swimshorts, towel, clean clothes into the blue Air France bag he usually carried for tennis. He took a taxi to Sally's apartment, where she was waiting for him at the entrance. She had no need to keep him waiting; she didn't play that game any more—she felt his need for her and forgot to protect herself. She said: "Darling! It's such a beautiful day for us!"

That was intelligence, wasn't it? Her own marriage had been a revolving door, in and out with practically no noise or loss of heat, but she probably knew more about it than he suspected. Surely she knew more than she would tell. And she had her own automobile, a blue Ford convertible, to which she just automatically handed him the keys—that too made her clever and deep. Like all American boys, he had dreamed of girls like her with their blond heads thrown back against the leather seats of cars like these. . . . That it was her automobile only gave the joke a turn. Once he got over the divorce, lawyers' fees, travel costs, the rest of it, he too would have the open car which his wife had always thought too dangerous, bad for a dry skin, impractical.

"Why didn't I think of picking you up at your hotel?" Sally asked.

"Never mind, just move over and sit close to me."

"Are you a onearm driver?"

"Like to be."

"Then I'll put a knob on the wheel for you."

Wryly he submitted to his retreat toward college-boy pleasures—the blond, the convertible, the exaggerations of flesh in erotic gaming. Well, he would tolerate himself, he would come out of it. Let

the submerged fantasies see the light, why not? Sally was there waiting, and more than merely *the blond*. She was Sally. Her silent smiling said that she was with him part of the way at least.

And they teased and played while he drove under the hot August sun through a part of the city, a part of the suburbs, out to the private country lake he had chosen because neither of them had been there for years. They paid to enter. On a weekday like this, they had the short clean beach almost to themselves. When they met on the beach after dressing, he submitted to a moment of shocked, almost unpleasant awe at her perfection of body under the blaze of sunlight. Beauty is pitiless. She turned under his brooding with a model's pouting halfsmile, her eyes blank, self-regarding, retreated into vanity. This must have been an old girlish habit. He hated the thought of her searching him for flaws, as he was now doing to her; but he needed to be looked at with pride, too. The different male and female ways about bodies would protect him, no? And hadn't they already begun the long study of each other in the close and secret dark?

Different, different.

She was a marvel, and that they both knew it somehow widened the space that had been closed by their first tentative lovemaking. A monument wants a pedestal.

Then she turned and ran, elbows pumping, toward the water. He caught her and they went in together. They laughed and spluttered, and she began swimming, and he caught her again. "Let's go out to the dock," she said. She swam poorly, splashing and puffing; he swam well and easily. Sally's wisdom! When he helped her up onto the outer dock, she was no longer a monument. She leaned on him, gasping a little and laughing. He kissed her shoulder with its gleaming, running beads of water. She nipped his hand with her bared teeth.

They lay a long while under the descending late afternoon sun, stretching against each other, talking at intervals, listening to the few shrill voices back on shore. He spoke a little of his wife. He did not speak of the children. "Just smile," she said sleepily, her face close to the hot whitewashed boards. "I don't want you to worry about a thing."

He stopped worrying. He put his arm on her back and rubbed the strong articulations of her spine until his fingers ached. She smiled, saying, "More, more, more. Ah that's nice."

She was very young, overproud of her body in the suburban way, just beginning to get past using it as a weapon instead of spending herself through the splendors of flesh. But she was learning, she was. And if her beauty alone had frightened him, could he ever have borne that rare loveliness which comes of beauty joined to a proper sense of its being? No, thank her for limitations. And she was learning to spend herself freely, too. And with him.

At sunset they sat up to watch. She leaned on him to share the radiating warmth of her body. They approved of the sky. He missed not seeing the children this evening, but he needed Sally now; he would go to them again tomorrow. With a fine sense of no hurry, no hurry for anything, they waited until the sun was gone.

But the swim back to shore made them furious with hunger. She suggested buying Chinese food and eating it at her apartment. They drank a great deal of tea and nothing else. The sunburn began to show on her face and arms. She put a stack of records on the machine. They made love slowly, patiently. "Why are you smiling?" he asked her, and she replied: "Why are you smiling?" He explored a generous body with its slowly stirring languors and bold risings to the touch. She explored whatever he meant to her. "Why *are* you smiling, now tell me!" His hand had discovered, with the sense of regaining a fine lost memory, the crisp, crinkly, blond hairs of her secret places.

They gave up talking. They loved each other until they both felt as light and pure as driftwood, and then all tumbled together they slept.

4

Paula, who was six, said to her father, "Mommy says you don't love her any more."

Her father, who was thirty-two, replied, "No, but I like her."

"But, but," said Cynthia, who was just four. "But can I go out and find Gary?"

"Why don't you stay with me for a little while?" her father asked. Dismayed by his querulousness, he repeated the remark in another voice. "Stay here with me. I have to go back soon. Anyway," he added, "it's almost bedtime."

"Okay," said Cynthia, resigned. She was a very small child, pouting and serious, with overbusy limbs. She paced back and

forth on the long, low, especially constructed, "contemporary" couch which her mother had bought partly because her father didn't want it.

"But *why* don't you love Mommy any more?" Paula insisted. "You always told me you did."

"That was b-b-before." Her father stammered for an explanation, dulled by knowing that there could be no valid one for Paula. "I tried—we did—I wanted to. We just weren't happy together. You know how that is, Paula."

"No," she said flatly and firmly.

"We have to live separately. It's like when you and Cynthia are tired and quarrel. We put you in separate rooms until you feel better."

"When are you and Mommy going to feel better?"

"It's not exactly that way with grownups." The sly innocence of Paula's question brought his hand out to touch her pleadingly; he wiped away the smudge of dirt on her cheek. She always made herself up with a stroke of dust as soon as possible when her mother washed her face. Cynthia, humming to herself, was listening with a smudge of prying watchfulness across her eyes. With a premature false security, the two girls frowned for serious discussion. The children of the divorced are engaged too soon in love as a strategy. Joy recedes before strategy; these children are robbed of their childhood. The huge brooding of possibility which human beings have at their best comes of the long passionate carnival of childhood; no fear of cost down this midway, just another and another breath-taking joyride on the great rollercoaster! and another quiet gathering-in of food and rest—it should be. It should be a storing of unquestioned certainties for the infinite risks of being a person. But instead, instead. Heavily Shaper touched the two girls as if to make them child animals again. It was not right that a father should feel this hopeless pity, and this need to enlist his daughters in the harried legions of rationality: "Here's how it is with grownups—"

"You mean Mommy and you?"

"Yes. Yes. Now listen. We feel better living in separate places. We're going to stay like that. But we like each other, Paula, and we love you and Cynthia. We both do."

"But, but, but, but," Cynthia sang, carefully wiping her feet on the pillows. "But heigh-ho, the derry-oh, the farmer takes a wife."

"Cynthia," said her father, "you shouldn't. Take off your shoes

if you're going to play on the couch. It wasn't made for children."

Cynthia looked at him silently and, scraping the fabric, slid down beside him. Paula pulled between his knees, fighting to get closer than her sister. She began to suck her thumb. Her father pressed his lips together, resisted the temptation to remove her thumb from her mouth, and instead lit a cigarette. He decided that perhaps his silence would oblige her to remove the thumb and speak. It did not. At last he said, "I want you to understand. Mommy wants you to understand, too. Even though I'm not going to be Mommy's husband anymore, I'll always be your father. I couldn't change that even if I wanted to, and besides, I would never want to. Don't you want always to be my daughters?"

Sucking busily, Paula said nothing.

Cynthia announced with a grin, "But I want a daddy who loves my mommy. I think maybe Uncle Carl, he loves Mommy—" The look on her father's face told her that he was not enjoying her joke. "But I *know* you're my daddy for real."

"I am. For real."

"Okay," she said, bored with the discussion.

Paula looked at her wet and slippery thumb, considered putting it back, had another idea. "Why doesn't Mommy say hardly anything to you no more?"

"*Any* more," her father said. "I already explained. Because we don't get along—just like we don't let you and Cynthia talk to each other when you don't get along—"

"But we do anyway! But that's only for a few minutes! But it's not, not, *not* the same thing, Daddy!"

"No," he said, "you're right. It's really not."

"Then *when*?"

"When what?"

"When are you coming to sleep here again?"

"I told you, I already explained. Mommy and I—"

"When you went away you said you'd come back to live here in a few days."

"Well, we thought maybe. I hoped. But it's worked out this way instead. Now listen to me, girls, it's not really so different. I see you very often. We go out together for milkshakes. We're just like before."

Silence from Cynthia. From Paula, coldly, suddenly with her mother's precise articulation: "It's not the same, and you know it."

"Okay, you're right, it's not." Her recognition of his hollow heartiness made him flush. She cut right through what he said. She remembered very well that he had been a part of the life of the house and she did not like her new sense of the house. He said, "I guess you're right, Paula, but that's how it is. That's all. We don't have to talk about it."

Silence. Then:

"So you really don't love Mommy any more." But she was a child again. The moment when she spoke with her mother's voice had passed. "Daddy," she said.

He resolved to go through it patiently once more. "No," he said, "and she doesn't love me. But we like each other, and we love and like you, both together, and we always will. You understand that, Cynthia?"

"Okay," said Cynthia.

Paula was sucking her thumb again. Her mouth was pulled around, working and bothering, as if she were trying to pull the skin off. She might be learning to bite the nail.

From the back of the house her mother walked toward the living room where the two children and their father were talking. She said hello, picked up a book, and returned to the bedroom. This meant that she would like him to notice that his time was up. A brisk, dark young woman, she was freshly showered and very pretty, although too thin. She wore a housecoat, but a girdle under it, stockings, and high heeled shoes. Obviously she wanted to get the girls to bed early because she was going out.

He began to say goodbye to his daughters. He reminded them that he would come to see them at noon tomorrow. Cynthia threw her arms around his neck, laughing, and demanded: "Bring me something, maybe a surprise!"

"If you like," he said. He had a sick lonely weakness in his stomach of something not yet done, not possible.

"Do you like me, Daddy?"

"I like you and love you, Cynthia kid."

Paula was rubbing her face against his hand, the thumb still in her mouth. He lifted her to kiss her, saying, "And Paula too. Now goodbye until tomorrow."

As he started down the stairs, Paula stood with her swollen thumb dripping and shouted after him: "Oh how I'm sick of those words love and like!"

The next day there were fresh flowers in a new vase on the coffee table. His wife was cool and abstracted and the familiar house could not have looked more strange to him if he had returned to find it filled with angry, overheated growth, like an abandoned greenhouse. Even not considering the flowers, the entire room spoke to him with faint whispers of disarray about how his wife (ah no! *former* wife!) had been out late and importantly that evening. A wrinkle in the carpet informed on her. The piled pillows on the couch were his witness.

"The children are having lunch," she said. "Would you like something?"

"No thanks, kid, I had a late breakfast."

She hid a small yawn behind her hand. "Me too." The yawn was excessive. It was more than required. She was putting it on with a trowel. Well, still, this was very much better than the hysteria with which she had sent their marriage into darkness, like a couple trapped forever at an abandoned Luna Park in the spinning, jolting cars of the Bug. Of course, this had its own special touch of refined cruelty, which merely went to show that she still depended on his feelings for some of her satisfactions. "Sit down, please," she said.

"Make myself at home?"

She smiled tolerantly. He wondered if she had any imagination for how it disturbed him to visit the place which had been his home, which in some way still was, which was so mysterious, like a room dreamed of and then found and then you're suddenly unsure of whether you really dreamed of it or only now think you did. Of course she understood; she had worked the house out for herself, and had a right to; but any imagination past this redecorating, working-it-out variety requires sympathy. When he looked up at her, she was still dressed in that social smile. Excessive!

"Some coffee?"

"No thanks, really. How do you think the children are taking things? My being away. Visiting. I was wondering if maybe I shouldn't see them too much when I'm in town. You can't make up for the normal daily—"

"Yes, overstimulating them."

"Too exciting," he said, giving up his thought by agreeing with her.

"They don't show it, of course. It's funny," she remarked, smiling patiently, as if it really were funny, while she explained the joke. "At their age they can't express it, they're too well behaved, they don't have the vocabulary for discussions. . . ."

He gave up listening. He was trying to place himself in this room. Sometimes they had pulled the shades and made love on the floor. He heard her despite the noise of memory. Her mania for psychology had always annoyed him. Jargonizing. And yet, and yet, once when she could not sleep he had held her in his arms on the couch while they quietly talked all night about her father and brother—she could talk English when she wanted to—and she spoke of love and violated need and loneliness. Then they had talked about each other and their own children and how different it would be. Then they had gone out on the porch to hold hands in the chill spring dawn and watch the lights go on in kitchens and bedrooms down the street. See, we didn't need that sleep, we've gained a night on everyone, he had said, and she had answered: Yes, yes, yes, we have something they don't have. I'll even make you a better breakfast!

"But," she was saying, "I'm afraid they will express what they're feeling about us now when they get to adolescence."

Another time, after a terrible quarrel—thinking that maybe with the guidance of their bodies which wanted to give to each other . . . —more than hopeful, prayerful, they had spread a quilt on the floor just below where she was now sitting. They had helped each other down as if crippled, slowly, slowly, and then safe on the floor, had flung all their strength into the cruel struggle to possess, a lurching grinding grasping assault on tenderness, and her head thrown back and her mouth open so that he could not see her teeth, only a dark place and a pulsing groan issuing deeply from within it, and then fiercely she closed and bit his shoulder and the cry, *You did it—you did it—you did it.*

What?

Oh love, love, love.

Would the rock be there the next day for rolling up the mountain?

He blinked and straightened his shoulders in the heavy inert grip of sweated clothes. Now was now and his former wife was talking. Now was also then, but his former wife was speaking. It

was now ten summers for them. She had something to tell him about their children.

“—with sibling rivalry,” she was saying. “They’re beginning the latency period.”

“Oh yes, yes.” Didn’t she remember how he disliked those words? What was she trying now? He went into the kitchen for a glass of water. The children made him rehearse what they would do together after lunch. The park and the swings and a milkshake. All the milkshakes they could drink.

When he returned she was sitting calmly in her chair, hands folded together, with a subdued halfsmile on her face. He recognized her analyzed smile, the one she reminded herself to slip into when she talked psychology. That little smile cost me a year’s pay. Okay, go easy, he told himself, it’s only a year’s pay. A convertible plus gas and insurance. A while in Europe. It’s a funny nice little darling of a smile, really—all sympathy and comprehension and let’s-be-mature-about-the-infantile-phase. No joy, no teeth either, but it’s still better than the screams, much easier on the neighbors and a good deal easier on me.

“Did you visit Pete and Ellen last night?” she asked.

It gave him a little malicious pleasure in his turn to let her know that he had not been lonely, that he had not even gone to see his best friends in Cleveland. “No, I had something else to do. I’ll see them in a day or so. I called them.”

They were both silent. All the maneuvering and rivaling warned him. He was doing nicely, but better get the kids out soon, get out quickly. If she felt his strength of distance, if she sensed Sally and stopped being nourished by whatever it was in the room, the flowers, whatever it was, things might go poorly again. He followed her eyes. Three novels by Evelyn Waugh, new in their jackets, were piled on an endtable. A quick twitch of grin crossed his face. He had never liked Waugh, neither had she; ever since college they had taken literature passionately and together, even after she had begun her long crush on the bound volumes of *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*. Now the little pile of Waugh was a roadmark meant to state: See, I’ve come under someone else’s influence. I’m reading the books *he* recommends, doing the things *he*. . . . It amused Shaper, but when he finally spoke his voice was husky and he had to swallow and it still didn’t clear. “I talked with Pete,” he said. “I suppose I should go out there.”

"Yes, if you're not too busy. Really, Dan, you don't have to be afraid about our friends. I wouldn't spite you for the world—"

"I'm not worried. They know me. I mean to see them, but you know how it is, things come up, I'm only here a few days."

With a thrill of satisfaction, he felt the balance swing over: I'm giving her now! She's getting it! This while he knew how much she pained only by how she goaded him—so rusted together are the ways of untying man and wife. And this all the while that his eye began to ache, that he asked himself a fleeing, trespassing question about how he could expect to hold his job while committed to this continuous deep marital work, that he suddenly saw a tiny receding Sally fretting and scowling and making up her eyes and mouth three times over because she was jealous of his quarrel with his wife. Sally's moods were reflected in heavy ways with her lipstick. His own lip was sore inside where he had bit it. That was his wife's habit which he had borrowed. Divorce, divorce! he thought. Let us be divorced in the flesh as we are by law!

She was watching him shrewdly. She knew him. He could keep the bitten lip from her, there was no way she could palp it. It was a contest to hold secret the hurt eye with its invisible throbbing. And then Cynthia ran up and put her hands in his pockets to see if he had gum.

"Get out, Cynthia! Go wait for your daddy in the other room. Paula has enough sense. Can't you see I'm talking to him?"

Like successive waves of fever and chills, chills and fever, his tenderness for the children, who resembled both his wife and him, gave way to hatred, hatred, cold disdain for this woman who forgot so much, who destroyed so much. And then a sharp new ache in his eye, flicking all the way up into his brain, no, just the sinuses, no, cruelly into the brain: Maybe I should just have given in. Maybe I should have taken it on her terms.

No, no! He wanted to turn off one whole side of his head. The eye had a furious life of its own. He warmed it, comforted it with his palm. Bent to it for an instant, he looked up again strictly. "You don't have to sit here if you're busy," he said.

"Oh I don't mind, Dan. And besides, there really are some little things we have to straighten out."

"Well, thank God most of that is over." And he added meaningfully, "We don't have to quarrel any more. We can concentrate on the children. We can be friends."

"Yes, of course, but turns out there are some other expenses—"

"Oh please, no, kid."

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Some other little things. It's complicated raising children under these circumstances, all alone—well, never mind that. Let me see. Not just Doctor Jonas, but—"

"What? That again? I won't bother pointing out about that one bill, but as to any others, you know very well—"

"You know very well!"

"Please don't be sarcastic. Let me finish." But she was staring at him with her enormous eyes turning black—as with anger, as with love—the pupils dilating and thick congested hate squirting like black arterial blood from a deep wound over the thin face. He struggled to be without memory. He thought again (how many times like this?) that if he could keep calm, keep easy, maybe she too would make the effort. He said in a low, forced, effortful voice, "You know very well that our agreement states that you meet all expenses out of the check I send you every month. There's no other way to do it, kid—"

"Don't call me kid! I never liked it! Your idea of an endearment!"

He went on stubbornly, quietly, "You know what my income is. I don't even. . . . Well, I'm not complaining. But there's nothing more to discuss about money unless I fail to send you the check some month."

"Kid! Kid! You still want to call me kid, but if one of your children needs some special care, what's it to you—?"

"What's the matter?" he interrupted, frowning. "*What* special care?"

She mimicked him with ungainly, ferocious sarcasm. "It's not in the agreement. . . ."

"Are you going to tell me? Or is this all nonsense again?"

"I want to send Paula to the Bainbridge School."

"What for? We—you can't afford a private school like that. Anyway, what does she need it for?"

"A fatherless child!"

"Is that my fault? Did you want me? Did you *want* me?"—and he felt the harsh sting of selfpity like dust at his eyes and he shook it

out angrily. "Didn't I fight to keep us together long after any other man would have run off or gone batty?"

She tapped her foot and did not answer. He had a suspicion that he could peel off her skin now and find a genuine, very satisfied smile, but with a forced calm—like his—she began patiently to explain. "I've discussed this with several people. The Bainbridge School—"

"I'll tell you just one thing: I don't have the money."

"—is oriented toward difficulties, special problems, broken homes—"

"Oriented, oriented!" He called out the word as if it were a verdict brought down upon her. He stood up, shaking. He had a throbbing frontal headache just behind his eyes. "Please let me get out of here, I've got to get out," he said. "Let me take the children and get out for a while. The little thing we should orient ourselves to is orienting ourselves toward not talking like this when they're watching."

And they both turned and admitted the presence of the two, very quiet, very thoughtful little girls. "We were just talking," Shaper said weakly.

Shrunkened and bent, all the pleasant civilizing of their time of separation scraped away, his wife managed to wipe the children's faces for their walk. At the door she turned to him and said severely, "When you come back, please leave them downstairs to play for a few minutes. I want to talk with you alone."

Blackmail! In order to see the children, in order to keep her from trying to rip him out of their lives as she had ripped him bleeding out of hers, he had to find some way of settling into a decent habit with her. The headaches that were already a tradition of their arguments made him almost blind in his left eye. He counted on her not interfering with the children—at least for this her psychology supported him—but he suspected that she wanted to think of him as an ideal monster, and then she could reason that for their own good they should *relate, transfer, orient* to some other man. Her words! That damn vocabulary! Lousy blackmail! He tried to soothe his eye by cupping the palm of his hand over it. Blackmail!

Within the dynamics of her romantic, absolutistic passion for the ideal, each failure between them had to be complete and each small difference total war. Symbols had become reality, reality had

become a great abstract, timeless, and predetermined sign; her energy was bent furiously on making reality over in the image of her idea about it, even at the cost of destroying its value as reality. (She could not measure the cost. Cost is not a part of heavenly systems.) This way of life has a kind of internal logic, perfect and unaffected by experience; there was no opposing it. Once her husband was defined by her needs ("It happened to me when I was immature"), there was nothing he could do to become human again. Even yielding to her—that most human of acts—enraged her because it violated her idea about him. She hurt herself, and could not stop, and threw herself and the husband she once loved and anyone else in the way (including their children) under the clanking treads of the interlocking syllogisms by which she lived: Good and Evil are pure; the ideal exists only in heaven; my husband is here below with me, on earth; therefore he is evil. I must have perfection; I do not have perfection; then this is hell I live in and I am damned and I will destroy, destroy, destroy. . . . Still, someday, O someday I will find pure virtue in a man! He must exist because I can imagine him. I need him right now! I deserve him, I call him, I insist on him! I am pure, I have waited for him, this other creature has no value because see the way he shrivels, vanishes, like a bad idea! I will prove that he does not exist by making him recognize it himself.

And so silly, smart novels. And bouquets of roses in a cut glass vase. Well, if he knew how she was getting at him, he should be able to get out of the way. And he didn't have to display Sally, either.

6

Fortified by wry self-congratulation at his assent to whatever she now needed in order to do away with him, he could turn his back on her judgment and go to another. He did not believe in magic; her eyes could no longer make love to him, make harm for him, uncover into life that which was only recently buried but quite dead, and down the dust came sifting fast. It was done. There were the children left, for ever and ever the heirs. He would shower again and scrub hard.

But always there returned the tangled memories which dragged him off the straight road leading from life into the violent death

of divorce and back into life again. Their children were not the only heirs, the only judges. It would be useful simply to hate her until he forgot her. It would be fine to despise her. Pride! But when he had almost succeeded (for example, in a sweet moment of fuel and money while having the oil checked in Sally's car), abruptly his greedy feeding on resentment came back to him, his joy and suspense before what she would do if she discovered that, for almost a year, there had been another girl. She needed the lesson; he had almost told her himself to let her know how he too might be lonely. . . . But recognized his cruelty. And remembered that the night before she found him out, she had risen to his grief and guilt to comfort him in what she took for a passing depression; there had been a miraculous access of tenderness and gratitude, and she had said, "We have the best little kids in the world, I know it, Dan. I'm sorry about the boy, I know it's foolish. Be patient with me. Care for me."

And then the next day the gossip came round and she had confronted him and he had thought, Let her learn, let her burn awhile. We've tried everything else.

Divorce time, wake up! It was time to move past his malice and her answering sweetness, past his yearning and her vindictiveness, past their other swinging meetings and partings, and years of it, common efforts, successes, bitter ultimate failure. While she talked, talked, talked, harassed him, practiced meanness, he could still find the silent regret faraway—deep in her eyes—apology, helpless apology—and yet the two of them could not settle together into firm admission of it. Her regret and her ancient willingness to love were resin-soaked roots. She consumed them. She refused to look at them. So be it, she seemed to have decided, abandoning her will with relief, and threw the uncured wood on the fire; and the destruction of what she most needed to grow from gave a wild hissing edge to her sarcasm, "I do wish that you would please stop calling me *kid*. Customarily that's for the children of goats. I seem to recall that I have a name."

Arson. She still remembered something more than that from him. On her face—as the lover in the morning finds on his darling's face the marks of their excess together during the night—he saw the brand of her secret self-appraisal, secret wish that it might be otherwise. It was like that thickness and slight purpling of eyelids in the morning after the flesh has made fantastic avowals that moments do

not die (even as the moment is dying), that what the intentions of lovers have brought together no God shall sunder (even as spirit and life notify us of matter and death). Who desires what they had now earned? She had wanted to want only him. To him she had cleaved for everything, rest, trust, energy, hope. "But I need a son, too," she had said. "Lots of women have sons. No one is perfect. I want *your* son, Dan, no one else's. Why can't I have the one thing I need?"

For everything, for too much.

As he recalled his chill judgment of her fever, the summer and the city spun crazily around him and he thought: It is as she says—all my fault, all! I was bored with her because I could not admit my need of her, because I feared that her weakness excluded me and she could do nothing for me. I took for boredom my dull despair of touching her without the qualification of a son, of receiving what a husband asks *without qualification*, so that I determined to need nothing at all from her and to build a life which did not depend on her. I sought to harden myself by freezing. Monstrous!

"You're a monster," she had shrieked when he admitted that his strength to indulge her had come from a little student at the Institute of Music.

"It didn't make any difference then. You were thinking about your skin, your waistline, your father, your analyst, your fantasies about a son—you didn't really care what I—"

The war again. Go! He leapt from the transport. His parachute was tangled. Other bodies hurtled free, mouths open, teeth bared, roaring with effort. They relished the free tumble into space; for him it was death. "Monster!" He plummeted. Didn't he have the same rights as others? No. He would be a sickness of gore on the earth below. "Monster, monster!" And then it came back to him, first with a belly-jerking violence, earth and life crashing up toward him as the parachute caught, opened, and he gasped, and then he lazily swung like a pendulum on a great clock: I am not a monster. Nor is she. But I am not, either.

He went to Sally that evening with something which he knew was not love, but she thought it was. Surely she was not really deceived; his need of her was what she needed, and love an irrelevance. Nevertheless she showed her doubt in ways that made it harder for him—her anxious trick of brushing and rebrushing her eyelashes

with mascara, her rather heavy step into the kitchen, giving him a glimpse of the thickened waist to come, the overbright, slightly foolish, false glee of her smile, responding to uneasiness by an American piece of advice, *Keep smiling!* She came back with coffee, a glare of teeth, blond eyelashes on which he made out tiny beads of blacking.

He asked her to take off her makeup and she did. His chill calculation shocked him. He wondered if his wife had so shot his nerves that all he could bear now would be a sweetly boring girl, worried only about pleasing him and getting the shine off her nose with the right shade of powder, a lover of musicals and of her beauty sleep—and of pleasing him! That quintessence of desirability! She watched, frowning. He grew tender and regretful. What could he ever do for her? She meant to be good to him. She studied him silently, unrepenting, with the pallor of the blond girl without makeup under bad light, and she suddenly seemed very beautiful, the most lovely woman in creation. He switched off the lamp and they moved toward each other in the dark.

When they lay down together, she said something which surprised him. It was trivial and familiar, like the breathless delicacies of undressing, and yet it was a trouble that she should cry out to him with words that seemed merely taken from a popular song: "Oh put yourself close to me baby."

How he wished for her silence then!

Afterwards he realized that the shock of vulgarity came not from her words but from his considering and judging her without interruption. He stroked her hair gently and felt sorry for her, for him. Someone was using someone. Somebody was somebody's weapon. There, there. "Sally, darling, I'm not good these days," he said. "I used to be, I want to be, but I'm in trouble."

"You are, you are, don't worry, you are good."

"I'm in bad trouble. I'm afraid. Nothing's clear any more."

"It will be, don't worry. You just need time, Dan. You make *me* happy."

"Do I?"

She put her finger on his mouth, shh. She wanted to sleep. He dozed too, asking himself, Why don't I ever think of her until I have to? That first day and the swimming was an accident, the false health of fever. Not right, not right, though I take my breath from her hair.

Then he slept.

In the middle of the night he woke with a start, with a sense of flapping inconsequential interruption, as if a cat had jumped onto his back. He lay staring into the murmurous dark and fearful of the dream he could almost remember which had awakened him. Oh yes, yes. Forget about it. He had been falling without a parachute for years and years. He did not crash to earth; he diminished. The starving man could not take food—even the thinnest broth was an agony to his constricted body.

The air conditioner threw its chill breeze into the room. Gradually, very slowly, reluctant to disturb the fine integrity of her sleep, he began to stretch against Sally for ease and new rest. She was warm, spreading, slightly curled as she lay. He pressed against the softly sleeping girl. He put his hand over her back and moved it down through slopes and valleys. She stirred and their mouths were breathing and feeding into each other. In a few minutes he heard a hoarse voice, his own, saying, "Oh come to me baby." She gathered him in.

7

The last day of the visit. Shaper wanted to store up memories of his children so that, like a camel, he could survive away from them through a season of drought. Yellow-eyed, lurching, he was still not a camel; he could not live for oases; he could not carry Paula and Cynthia in a hump. Still he had hope. Although it was already several days past the end for his wife and him, he believed that perhaps they could manage one more meeting for the sake of the children.

Sally gave him her automobile to drive out to the house. This time the mild luxury, moving through traffic in the sun with the top down, failed to reassure him. He found himself singing an old Louis Armstrong blues tune:

*From milkless milk
And silkless silk
Love oh love oh loveless love*

On an impulse he stopped at Peter's, found him home, and asked him to come along. "My wife and I will both be on good behavior

with a third party present.” And he looked away. “That’s the way it is, Pete. Sorry.”

The children were shy; they knew he was going. They had no practice in goodbyes. For them he was already gone. Paula gave him a drawing of flowers and the sun to put on his wall—“where you live, Daddy.” The sun was sticking out its tongue.

As the subdued and uneventful visit ended, it occurred to Shaper that Pete might find his insistence on having a witness somewhat melodramatic.

“Goodbye,” he said to his wife.

“Goodbye,” she said.

“I hope everything goes well.”

“Have a good trip back.”

They shook hands. Peter looked embarrassed. They went downstairs. Shaper glanced back from the driveway and at the same moment two things happened: The children came out to stand on the upstairs porch and his wife came running down the stairs. She paused, breathing shallowly, before Shaper and Peter near the door of the automobile. She put out her hand with a slip of paper in it. “I enrolled Paula at that school,” she said softly. “I forgot to mention it. Here’s the bill.”

He drew back and tried to look merely puzzled. “You know I’m not supposed to. . . . I can’t pay these bills. We already decided about that.”

She held to the low tone, but there was a stir and hiss in her voice. “Who decided? Who? Who decided?”

“Look,”—and he was pleading although he knew this was the wrong way to move her. He had only found a steady right way when he was sick and needed her out of helplessness. It was the only way he could count on for sure. It was no way by which he could live. “Look, I sent a check for that dentist’s bill, although you were wrong about the date. It came after our agreement. Now please try to understand, there’s got to be a stop.”

“A stop to what?”

“We have to start living the way things are. We have to adjust. You’ve said it yourself. Money shouldn’t get in the way now. Our lawyers—” And he watched the pinched face and the black, swollen eyes replacing that bright young divorcee which was her pleasant role. He had hoped, but once more he misjudged her. Through

those inky eyes, through the cloud of hate with which she blinded herself and poisoned him, she would not see what they had sometimes been for each other—she never saw that any more; she would not see the neighbors, she would not see Peter, she would not see the children. “Kid! Listen to me, please!” And he had no words to force her to remember how they had held hands and strolled in parks, and tenderly made up many quarrels, and congratulated each other that the girls were a fine combination of the best in both of them.

A stop? Her lips were saying, working within, white and diminishing.

“Listen, please, *please*,” he said, “you have to understand how things are with me now. I live in a room, don’t you understand? One room. I’m not a college kid, I’m not used to it any more. One furnished room, do you hear me? I save my money so I can fly in to see the children—”

“Then don’t do it.”

“What did you say, kid?” He leaned forward, trying to see her. “I’m sorry, I didn’t understand.”

“I said stay there. Get yourself a kitchenette. Don’t bother coming in.”

He held his breath. He was peering into a night and his eye was tired. It throbbed and he wanted to comfort it with his palm. It seemed very important this time not to let her know about the ache in his eye. He straightened up and said, “Look at me. Look at us, kid.” His eye wanted an eye to return its gaze.

“Just don’t bother,” she said, as if her mind were far away with household thoughts. “Stay away. I could spend the money. Who needs you here? Don’t bother.”

She drew closer to him with a little smile on her face.

“And I may as well give you one other bit of information. Why not? Since you’re leaving again.” She spoke this last phrase slowly, as if it were particularly important. He recognized the angry wenchy smell which her body gave up when she could no longer hold on. She said: “Now I feel like a woman. I’ve found a man who knows how.”

In the first moment of almost prudish shock, he felt his face being fixed in a skeletal grin. “That had to come. The list is complete. Okay. All right.” But the grin spread uncontrollably, attacking his bones, dissolving the sockets of his eyes.

"It was no good with you. Your fault. It was never any good."

"All right," he said, "congratulations." He turned to Peter. "You hear? My wife was a virgin all along."

"Yes," she said, "that's about it. I told Carl, too, how I was never touched. Since you're going away again, you might as well have this to take with you. Nothing. Never anything, though I tried to make you believe . . ."

Their children were leaning over the railing to peer down on them. His hand flew toward his eye; he stopped it midway and put it down. He said: "All right, there's no point in discussing this either, is there? Our lawyers have it all settled now. We paid the lawyers to do this job for us."

"Lawyers!" And it was done. Something new had been released, and in public, in the summertime, with people coming out on their porches or peering through the screens to listen and saying *a shame* and smiling to themselves. "You want lawyers to raise our children?" she shouted. "That's your idea of a father?"

"All right, all right," he said in a low hoarse voice. He held himself stiffly, shaking with fury and disappointment. "Can't you control it? All this nonsense. There are people. You're doing it on purpose, kid, don't you see?"

She screamed as if he had struck her. "Don't call me kid! Just get out of my life!"

"Okay, okay." He turned to climb into the car. Peter was already huddled miserably on the seat. As he moved behind the wheel, he felt an almost physical eruption, a brutal crack in his throat, and the word came out, "Fishwife!"

"Corrupt! Corrupt!" she was shrieking at him. "Get out of my driveway! Go! Corrupt! You never cared for me or your kids—*children*,"—and desperately she sobbed the correction. "Or anyone but yourself! Get out of my life!"

That was how, standing silently together on the porch, the children saw him last. He was being chased by their mother's rage.

At the corner he pulled over to the curb and asked Peter to drive. "I'm not in control," he said, shivering, and went on as if this were the total explanation. "It was what broke us up. I had to stop, I couldn't be run by her temper. Once I saw Paula watching me back down like a fool just because of that look she gets in her eyes—you saw it, Pete—when she can't be reached. When I saw my

daughter judging me. . . . It didn't even help to slap her, I tried that once or twice"

Peter turned and drove through the long park along East Boulevard. He was explaining, comforting, merely talking. "Well, she has to feel better about what she's doing. She's not the kind of woman who can take ambiguity. You have to be all good or all bad, and you're *it*, man. Once you could do no wrong; now. . . . Well, women are like that. Don't think she's going to be nice for the sake of the past."

"What about the kids?"

"The past has got to be wiped out. Women have their feet on the ground—anyway they call it the ground, sometimes it's our faces—and one thing she thinks she can do for the next man—whoever he is, I don't know if she's telling the truth," he added hurriedly, "is just wipe you out. That way she gets to be a girl again. She said it plain enough. For her you've got to be pure mistake, friend, and nothing else. Evil Dan the Bad Young Man."

"No kindness at all? That's how I'd like to be. Let me tell you something: When we first decided to separate we both wept."

Peter shook his head. "She told Ellen *you* cried. She said you're maudlin. She said you held her hand until it ached. Make up your mind to take it. Women—" Did Peter believe what he was saying? No, he was tuckered out and embarrassed and his mouth was uttering for him the cynical clichés about women which men in club cars tell each other. It was what he thought Dan wanted to hear. He may even have believed it true at that moment, true because it sounded familiar, and with a deep breath of fatigue (he thought this was sympathy) he again spoke what he took to be comfort to his friend: "Women," he sighed.

"But doesn't she look all yellow, sick? Her skin that color and those enormous black eyes. Yellow, sick, and mean. She used to be so pretty. She still is. Oh she hates me!"

They both fell silent. When Peter felt that he had done his duty, he asked to be dropped at home. He needed to get away. He loved his own wife; he felt as disconnected, tired, and jittery as if he had been casually unfaithful to her. Naturally he resented his old friend for bringing him to this possibility, and also—because his wife was surely his best friend—he resented Dan for eliciting his jovial male cynicisms. And within, too, he felt a thrill of pride: not for him this failure! This is the pleasure we are said to feel at funerals. And at a

still deeper, more solemn place, because he was a good and kind man, he felt regret for his friend and also knew something of what was happening to him. This sense came up through the barriers as discomfort, as a desire to squirm: I can't take it, I want to do my duty by you, Dan; I want to get away. He had his own wife and children to play with on a fine dry summer afternoon. Ellen had asked him to do some shopping.

8

I held her hand until it hurt her! And what a bore she was with her whining and her headaches and her suspicions! Suspicions!

Better. He used his old ritual for remembering himself into gratitude for freedom: her nagging, her picking at her face in the mirror, her stiff jealous mouth with the white lines. Sure, finally he had given her cause for jealousy, why not? But first he had warned her that she was making him lonely when she stood before the mirror, plucking, squeezing, hating herself, dreaming of miraculous sources of happiness—her father fantastically restored to life, a baby boy instead of girls, an analyst who really understood and *said* something.

*With dreamless dreams
And schemeless schemes
Love oh love oh—*

It was fine to be driving Sally's car with the top down. She was waiting for him, and she would be all health and dazzling smiles, unskilled in moping, untrained for meanness.

But don't you have to take a woman from strength, not weakness, if you are to give her anything important and receive anything worth taking?

And after his ten-year marriage, wasn't he too distant from Sally to bring her anything but that cheating desire, the need for comfort? He had loved his wife despite everything, he knew he had, they had been young and unmarked together, he insisted on remembering—and he did not love Sally. He made too much of the hot pity of bodies. He had thought to find love by loving, but instead, at length, filled with crazy pride, he had discovered sex. The solution was as ineffective as the discovery was unoriginal. Like his wife, he made too much of things.

When what he needed to save his life was simplicity, a bare white room and sleep, restoring sleep, how long could greater and greater complication soothe him?

Didn't that mean only trouble to come?

Perhaps. He parked Sally's automobile on the street before the massive, teeming apartment building—luxury circa 1928—in which she lived with her closets full of clothes, her mirrors, her pink-feathered slippers, and her music-to-dream-by. But if he couldn't allow himself Sally, that beautiful and perhaps silly girl—yes, he should say it out, maybe it's true—he might be unable to prevent doing what he had too often already considered. He had stood caught in the middle of his furnished room and thought it through. He had first been indulgent, then shocked by the persistence of the idea. Apparently it was one to reckon with.

He went up the long walk to the stuffy, over-decorated entrance, found her bell, and rang it. Could Sally stop his idea?

As he often did, he tried to think of what would happen to the children. That was a puzzler.

W. D. SNODGRASS

A Cardinal

I wake late and leave
the refurbished quonset
where they let me live.
I feel like their leftovers:
they keep me for the onset
of some new war or other.

With half a ream of paper
and fountain pens, equipped
with ink and ink eraser,
a book to hunt up words,
and the same old manuscripts,
I tromp off to the woods,

the little stand of birches
between golf course and campus
where birds flirt through the branches
and the city will be hushed.
Inside this narrow compass
I crash through underbrush,

beer cans and lovers' trash
in search of my horizons
of meadowlark and thrush.
Yet near me, here, it's still.
I carry a scared silence
with me like my smell.

At each of my footsteps
one of the insect noises
in the tall grass, stops.
The weeds sing where I leave.
All the living voices
evade me like beliefs.

Well, let them look *me* up
and take their own sweet time;
I've come to set up shop
under this blue spruce
and tinker at my rhymes.
God knows it's little use;

God knows I have spent ages
peering like a stuffed owl
at these same blank pages
and, though I strained to listen,
the world lay wrapped with wool
far as the ends of distance.

And what do I hear today?
Little that sounds mine—
in town, across the way,
mill whistles squeal;
now, closer by, the whine
of a freight car's wheels;

out on the superturnpike
the cattle trucks and trailers
lumbering toward next week;
beyond, from the county airport,
where golf balls veer like tracers,
great engines thunder their part

in this devil's Mass
of marketable praise.
Oh, they've all found *their* voices.
And now I catch a meter
under this heavy prose
of factories and motors:

the college air cadets
are on their grinder, marching,
counting out their cadence,

one two three four, creating
for the school and market
the ground bass of our credo—

faith in free enterprise
and our unselfish forces
who chant to advertise
the ancient pulse of violence.
Meantime, I fuss with phrases
or clamp my jaws in silence.

Watch out; what's this red
bird, fluttering up to perch
ten feet from my head!
See the green insect wings,
pinched in his beak, twitch.
He swallows it. And sings.

Speak of the bloody devil!
Old sleek satanic cardinal—
you get your bellyful,
maintain the ancient Law,
and celebrate this ordinal
of the red beak and claw.

You natural Jesuit,
sing, in your fine feathers,
Hosannah to Appetite;
announce to the woods and hills
the one god of our fathers
is living in us still;

sing for the flyboys, birdy,
in praise of their profession;
sing for the choirs of pretty
slogans and catch-phrases
that rule us by obsession;
praise what it pays to praise:

praise soap and garbage cans,
join with the majority
in praising man-eat-man,
or praise the young who sell
their minds to retire at forty.
With honor.

Go to hell!

Good God! This is absurd!
A veritable scarecrow!
I curse out a poor bird
for daring feed his belly;
now my bird has flown
and left me in this gully.

It is absurd, absurd
Darwinian self-pity!
As if a self-made bird
would sign his days to sergeants,
his soul to a committee,
or call himself a bargain!

As if I'd never heard
what the birds' song means;
as if I'd ask a bird
to mortify his body.
Wait; from the next ravine,
he's singing again, already.

And he outspeaks a vital
claim to know his needs;
his song's a squatter's title
on his tree and the half acre
in which he hunts and breeds
and feeds the best he's able.

To enemies and rivals,
to mates and quick beetles,

he sings out for survival:
"I want my meals and loving;
I fight nobody's battles;
don't pardon me for living.

The world's not done to me;
it is what I do;
whom I speak shall be;
I music out my name
and what I tell is who
in all the world I am."

We whistle in the dark
of a region in doubt
where unknown powers work,
as watchmen in the night
ring bells to say, *Watch out,*
I am here; I have the right.

It should be recognized
I have not come sneaking
and look for no surprises.
Lives are saved this way.
Each trade has its way of speaking,
each bird its name to say.

We whistle in the dark
to drive the devils off.
Each dog creates his bark.
Even I, in Navy blues,
I whistled *Wachet Auf*
to tell the sailors who.

He's back; obliquely flying
under a trail of vapor,
our sky's white center-line.
A robin goes by, wrestling
a streamer of toiletpaper
his mate might want for nesting.

Selfish, unorthodox,
they live upon our leavings.
Boys or cats or hawks
can scare them out of song.
Still, long as they are living,
they are not still for long.

Each year the city leaves
less of trees or meadows;
they nest in our very eaves
and say what they have to say.
Assertion is their credo;
style tells their policy.

All bugs, now, and the birds
witness once more their voices
though I'm still in their weeds
tracking my specimen words,
replenishing the verses
of nobody else's world.

The Mother

from the Russian of Kozma Petrovitch Prutkov

She stands in the dead center like a star;
They form around her like her satellites
Who take her energies, her heat, light
And massive attraction on their paths, however far.

Though born of her own flesh, she feels them drawn
Into the outer cold by dark forces;
They are in love with suffering and perversion,
With the community of pain. She thinks them gone,

Out of her reach, and is consoled by evil
In children, in neighbors, in the world she cannot change,
The lightless universe where they range
Beyond the comforts of her disapproval.

If evil did not exist, she would create it
 To die in righteousness, her martyrdom
 For that sweet dominion they have bolted from.
 She will believe only that she is hated

And is content. Life can decay or break
 Or spoil itself; she'll save the waste, debris,
 In loving tenderness, to give them; she
 Will weave her labyrinth out of filth, wreckage

And hocus-pocus, leave free no fault
 Or cornerhole outside those lines of force
 Where she and only she can thread a course.
 All else in her grasp grows clogged and halts.

Till, one by one, the areas of her brain
 Switch off and she has filled all empty spaces;
 Then she hallucinates in their right places
 Their after-images, reversed and faint,

And the drawn strands of love, spun in her mind,
 Turn black and cluttered, precariously hung
 With the dark shapes of her mates, her sapless young,
 Where she moves by habit, hungering and blind.

Home Town

I go out like a ghost,
 nights, to walk the streets
 I walked fifteen years younger—
 seeking my old defeats,
 devoured by the old hunger.
 I had supposed

this longing and upheaval
 had left me with my youth.
 Fifteen years gone; once more,
 the old lies are the truth:

I must prove I dare,
and the world, and love, is evil.

I have had loves, had such
honors as freely came;
it does not seem to matter.
Boys swagger just the same
along the curbs, or mutter
among themselves and watch.

They're out for the same prize.
And, as the evening grows,
the young girls take the street,
hard, in harlequin clothes,
with black shells on their feet
and challenge in their eyes.

Like a young bitch in her season
she walked the carnival
tonight, trailed by boys;
then, stopped at a penny stall
for me; by glittering toys
the pitchman called the reason

to come and take a chance,
try my hand, my skill.
I could not look; bereft
of breath, against my will,
I walked ahead and left
her there without one glance.

Pale soul, consumed by fear
of the living world you haunt,
have you learned what habits lead you
to hunt what you don't want;
learned who does not need you;
learned you are no one here?

GEORG SIMMEL

Two Essays¹

THE HANDLE

MODERN THEORIES OF ART strongly emphasize that the essential task of painting and sculpture is the depiction of the spatial organization of things. Assenting readily to this, one may then easily fail to recognize that space within a painting is a structure altogether different from the real space we experience. Within actual space an object can be touched, whereas in a painting it can only be looked at; each portion of real space is experienced as part of an infinite expanse, but the space of a picture is experienced as a self-enclosed world; the real object interacts with everything that surges past or hovers around it, but the content of a work of art cuts off these threads, fusing only its own elements into a self-sufficient unity. Hence, the work of art leads its life beyond reality. To be sure, the work of art draws its content from reality, but from visions of reality it builds a sovereign realm. While the canvas and the pigment on it are parts of reality, the work of art constructed out of them exists in an ideal space which can no more come in contact with actual space than tones can touch smells.

This holds for every utensil, for every vase, in so far as it is looked upon as having an aesthetic value. As a piece of metal which is tangible, weighable, and incorporated into both the ways and contexts of the surrounding world, a vase is a segment of reality. At the same time, its artistic form leads an existence completely detached and self-contained, for which the material reality of the metal is merely the vehicle. A vessel, however, unlike a painting or statue, is not intended to be insulated and untouchable but is meant to fulfill a purpose—if only symbolically. For it is held in the hand and drawn into the movement of practical life. Thus the vessel stands in two worlds at one and the same time: whereas reality is completely irrelevant to the “pure” work of art and, as it were, is consumed in it, reality does make claims upon the

¹ Georg Simmel, “Der Henkel” and “Die Ruine,” *Philosophische Kultur* (1911), 2nd ed., Leipzig: Alfred Kröner, 1919, pp. 116-124 and 125-133. Reproduced by permission of Else Simmel, M.D. Copyright 1958 The Ohio State University Press.

vase as an object that is handled, filled and emptied, proffered, and set down here and there.

This dual nature of the vase is most decisively expressed in its handle. The handle is the part by which it is grasped, lifted, and tilted; in the handle the vase projects visibly into that real world which relates it to everything external, to an environment that does not exist for the work of art as such. But then the body of the vase is certainly not alone in being subjugated to the demands of art; for were this the case, the handles would be reduced to mere grips, unrelated to the aesthetic value of their form, like the hooks and eyes of a picture frame. Rather, the handles connecting the vase with the world outside art also become components of the art form; they must be justified purely as shapes and as constituting a *single* aesthetic vision with the body of the vase, irrespective of the fact that they have a practical purpose. By virtue of this double significance, and because of the clear and characteristic way in which this significance emerges, the handle as a phenomenon becomes one of the most absorbing aesthetic problems.

Our unconscious criterion for the aesthetic effect of the handle seems to be the manner in which its shape harmonizes these two worlds—the world on the outside which, with the handle, makes its claim on the vessel, and the world of art which, heedless of the other, demands the handle for itself. Moreover, not only must it be possible for the handle actually to perform its practical function, but the possibility must also be manifest in its appearance, and emphatically so in the case of apparently soldered handles, as opposed to those apparently shaped in one movement with the body of the vase. The first of these types indicates that the handle is attached by external forces and comes from an external order of things; it brings into prominence the meaning of the handle as something reaching outside the pure art form. This contrast between vase and handle is more sharply accentuated when, as frequently happens, the handle has the shape of a snake, lizard, or dragon. These forms suggest the special significance of the handle: it looks as though the animal had crawled on to the vase from the outside, to be incorporated into the complete form only, as it were, as an afterthought.

The fact that the handle belongs to the quite different realm in which it originated, and which now uses the handle to claim the vase for itself, becomes apparent through its visible aesthetic

unity with the vase. In complete opposition to this, the strongest accent in some vases is on the tendency toward unity. They appear to have been whole forms first, the material extending to the periphery without a break; only afterward was enough material removed so that what remained constituted the handles. We find such modeling done to perfection in certain Chinese bowls, the handles of which are cut out of the cold metal. A similar incorporation of the handles into the aesthetic unity is more organically accented wherever the handle seems to be driven out of the body of the vessel in an uninterrupted transition, and by the same forces that shaped the body itself. For this is like a man's arms which, having grown as part of the same organizational process as his torso, also mediate the relationship of the whole being to the world outside it.

Sometimes shallow bowls are shaped in such a way that, together with their handles, they produce an effect of leaf and stem. Very beautiful examples of such bowls from ancient Central American culture have been preserved—bowls in which the unity of organic growth palpably connects the two parts. The tool, as such, has been characterized as an extension of the hand or of human organs generally. In effect, just as the hand is a tool of the soul, so too the tool is a hand of the soul. Although the fact that it is a tool divorces the hand from the soul, it does not prevent the process of life from flowing through both in intimate unity; their being both apart and together constitutes the unanalyzable secret of life. But life reaches out beyond the immediate circumference of the body and assimilates the "tool" to itself; or better still, a foreign substance *becomes* a tool in that the soul pulls it into its life, into that zone around it which fulfills its impulses. The distinction between being external to the soul and being within it—simultaneously important for the body and of no significance—is, for the things beyond the body, both retained and resolved in a single act by the great motif of the tool in the stream of a life that is unified and transcends itself. The shallow bowl is nothing but an extension or augmentation of the creative hand bearing it. But the bowl is not simply held in the palm of the hand; it is grasped by the handle. Thus, a mediating bridge is formed, a pliable joining of hand with bowl, which, with a palpable continuity, transmits the impulse of the soul into the bowl, into its manipulation. But then, through the reflux of this energy, the

bowl is drawn into the circumference of the life of the soul. This relationship cannot be symbolized more perfectly than by a bowl unfolding from its handle like a leaf from its stem. It is as if man were here utilizing the channels of the natural flow of sap between stem and leaf in order to pour his own impulses into an external object, thereby incorporating it into the order of his own life.

When, in the appearance of the handle, one of its two functions is completely neglected in favor of the other, the impression made strikes a discordant note. This often occurs, for example, when the handles form merely a kind of relief ornament, being fully attached to the body of the vase, leaving no space between vase and handle. Here, the form rules out the purpose of the handle (that with it the vase may be grasped and handled), evoking a painful feeling of ineptness and confinement, similar to that produced by a man who has his arms bound to his body. And in such cases, only rarely can the decorative beauty of its appearance compensate for the fact that the inner tendency of the vase toward unity has negated its relatedness to the outer world.

However, just as the aesthetic form must not become so self-willed as to make impossible perception of the handle's purposiveness (even when, as in the case of the ornamental vase, it is out of the question in practice), a disagreeable picture also results whenever the purposiveness works in so many different directions that the unity of the impression is broken up. There are Greek vases that have three handles: two on the body by which the vase can be grasped with both hands and inclined in one or the other direction, and one at the neck by which it can be tilted to one side only. The decidedly ugly impression of these pieces is not caused by a violation of standards appropriate to either visual form or practical utility. For why shouldn't a vessel be tilted in several directions? The ugliness, it seems to me, can rather be traced to the fact that the movements laid out in this system can take place only one *after* the other, whereas the handles present themselves *simultaneously*. Thus completely confused and contradictory feelings of motion are produced; for although the demands of clarity and of utility do not, so to speak, contradict each other on a primary level, the unity of the vision is broken up indirectly: the handles which are, as it were, potential movements are present simultaneously, whereas any actualizing of these movements in practice must deny this simultaneity.

This imbalance suggests the other aesthetic defect of the handle:

its exaggerated separation from the unified impression of the vase. To understand this flaw requires a digression. The most extreme estrangement of the handle from the vessel as a whole—that is, the strongest indication of its practical purpose—is to be found when the handle is not rigidly connected with the body of the vessel at all but is movable. In the language of materials, this is often accentuated by having the substance of the handle different from that of the vessel. Such a design allows for a variety of combinations in appearance.

In some Greek vases and bowls, the handle, rigidly attached to the body of the vessel and made of the same substance, has the character of a broad band. If the handle of this kind of vase retains its unity of form with the vessel, the result can be a happy one. The material of a band which differs greatly in weight, consistency, and flexibility from that of the body of a vase is here symbolized and, by hinting at these differences, the design sufficiently indicates that the handle belongs to another province of existence. At the same time, because the material is actually the same as that of the vase, the aesthetic coherence of the whole is still maintained. The delicate and unstable balance of the two claims on the handle shifts most unfavorably, however, when the fixed handle is in fact of the same substance as the body of the vase but naturalistically imitates another substance in order to stress its special significance by this different appearance. Particularly among the Japanese, otherwise the greatest masters of the handle, the following abomination can be found: fixed porcelain handles that arch beyond the diameter of the vase and accurately imitate the moveable straw handles of tea pots. How much a foreign world obtrudes itself, by means of the handle, upon the independent significance of the vase becomes particularly obvious when the special purpose of the handle imparts a quite unnatural and masklike surface to the material of the vase. Just as the handle which merges with the body of the vase without any gap exaggerates one-sidedly the fact that it belongs to the vase (at the cost of not manifesting its purpose), so this latter type goes to the opposite extreme: the remoteness of the handle from the remainder of the vase cannot be stressed more ruthlessly than when the handle takes on the substance of that remainder but forces upon it the appearance of an entirely dissimilar hoop which seems merely to have been fastened on from the outside.

The principle of the handle—to mediate between the work of

art and the world while it remains wholly incorporated in the art form—is finally confirmed by the fact that its counterpart, the opening or spout of the vessel, works according to an analogous principle. With the handle the world approaches the vessel; with the spout the vessel reaches out into the world. Only then is the vessel fully integrated into human teleology, in receiving its current through the handle and in yielding it again through the opening. Precisely because the spout is an opening of the vessel itself, it is easier to connect its form organically with that of the vessel. Accordingly, such unnatural and self-contradictory degenerations as are found in the case of handles occur only rarely. (The very expressions “snout” and “nozzle,” for which the handle offers no parallel, indicate the spout’s organic function as a part of the body.)

The fact that handle and spout correspond to each other visually as the extreme points of the vessel’s diameter and that they must maintain a certain balance reflects the roles they play: while of course they serve as the enclosing boundaries of the vessel, they still connect it with the practical world—one centripetally, the other centrifugally. It is like the relation of man as soul to existence outside him: by means of the sense organs’ sensitivity, the corporeal reaches to the soul; by means of willed innervations, the soul reaches out into the corporeal world. Both activities belong to the soul and to the closed sphere of its consciousness; and although the soul’s sphere is the opposite of the corporeal one, it is, nevertheless, intertwined with it through these two processes.

The handle belongs to the enclosed unity of the vase and at the same time designates the point of entrance for a teleology that is completely external to that form. It is of the most fundamental interest that the purely formal *aesthetic* demands on the handle are fulfilled when these two symbolic meanings of it are brought into harmony or equilibrium. Yet this is not an example of that curious dogma which makes utility a criterion of beauty. For the point at issue is precisely that utility and beauty come to the handle as two unrelated demands—the first from the world, and the second from the total form of the vase. And now, as it were, a beauty of a higher order transcends both of these claims and reveals that their dualism ultimately constitutes a unity that is not further describable. Because of the great span between its two components, the handle becomes a most significant cue to this higher beauty. Till now, art theory has hardly touched on the

kind of beauty which contains beauty in the narrower sense merely as one of its elements. Formal beauty, together with all of the demands of idea and life, is incorporated by what one might call supraesthetic beauty into a new synthetic form. Beauty of this ultimate kind is probably the decisive characteristic of all really great works of art; the fact that we give it recognition divorces our position sharply from any aestheticism.

Besides the approach we have been pursuing, it may perhaps be worth while to apply a second, equally far-reaching, interpretation to so unpretentious a phenomenon: we are speaking of the *breadth* of symbolic relations which is revealed by its very validity for things in themselves insignificant. For we are concerned with nothing less than the great human and ideal synthesis and antithesis: a being belongs wholly to the unity of a sphere which encloses it and which at the same time is claimed by an entirely different order of things. The latter sphere imposes a purpose upon the former, thereby determining its form. Nevertheless, the form in no way loses its proper place in the first context but retains it as if the second didn't exist at all. A remarkable number of spheres in which we find ourselves—political, professional, social, and familial—are enclosed by further spheres, just as the practical environment surrounds the vessel. This relationship is such that the individual, belonging to a more restricted and closed sphere, thereby projects into a larger one. Whenever the more comprehensive sphere must, as it were, manipulate the smaller one and draw it into its own teleology, the individual, too, is manipulated by the more inclusive sphere. Just as the handle must not destroy the unity of the vase's form for the sake of its readiness to perform its practical task, so the art of living demands that the individual maintain his role in his immediate, organically closed sphere while at the same time serving the purposes of the larger unity. With this service he helps to place the smaller sphere into the order of the more inclusive one.

It is the same with our particular provinces of interest. Whenever we pursue knowledge or are subject to ethical demands or create structures that have objective norms, we enter, with the parts or faculties of our selves that are involved, into ideal orders that are propelled by an inner logic, by a developmental impetus that is superpersonal. These orders always seize the totality of our energy by means of such particular faculties and enlist it into

their own service. Everything now depends on our not permitting the integrity of our self-centered being to be destroyed. Every single ability, action, and obligation pertaining to that being must remain tied to the law of its unity while at the same time we belong to that ideal external realm which makes us into points of transition for *its* teleology. Perhaps this duality formulates the richness of the life of men and things; for after all, this wealth consists of the diversity of the ways in which men and things belong to each other, of the fact that they are simultaneously inside and outside one another, and that every involvement and fusion in one direction is also a dissolution, since it is contrasted with an involvement and fusion in another direction. What is most remarkable in the way man understands and constructs the world is that a single element experiences the self-sufficiency of an organic whole, as if no aspect of it were left outside, while at the same time it can be a channel through which an entirely different life flows into the first, a grip by which the totality of one grasps the totality of the other without either of them being torn to pieces.

The handle is perhaps the most superficial symbol of this category; but, precisely because of its superficiality, it reveals the range of the category to the fullest. Thus, that we are granted a plenitude of life both lived and shared is probably a reflection of the destiny of our soul, a soul that has its home in two worlds. For our soul, too, can perfect itself only to the degree to which it belongs, as a necessary component, to the one world and reaches out into the entangled strands and into the meaning of the other—not in spite of, but by means of, the form which membership in the first world imposes on it. It is as if the soul were an arm which one of the worlds—whether the real or the ideal—stretches out, so that it may seize the other and join it to itself, and be grasped by and joined to it.

[*Translated by Rudolph H. Weingartner*]

THE RUIN

ARCHITECTURE IS THE ONLY ART in which the great struggle between the will of the spirit and the necessity of nature issues into real peace: that in which the soul in its upward striving and nature in its gravity are held in balance. In poetry, painting, music, the laws governing the materials must be made dumbly submissive to the artistic conception which, in the perfect work, wholly and invisibly absorbs them. Even in sculpture the tangible piece of marble is not the work of art; what stone or bronze of themselves contribute to the work has its effect only as a means of expressing spirit. Although architecture, too, uses and distributes the weight and carrying power of matter according to a plan conceivable only in the human soul, within this plan the matter works by means of its own nature—carrying the plan out, as it were, with its own forces. This is the most sublime victory of the spirit over nature—a situation like that which obtains when we know how to guide a person so that he realizes our will through his own. His will has not been overpowered; rather, the very tendency of his own nature is made to execute our plan.

This unique balance—between mechanical, inert matter which passively resists pressure, and informing spirituality which pushes upward—breaks, however, the instant a building crumbles. For this means nothing else than that merely natural forces begin to become master over the work of man: the balance between nature and spirit, which the building manifested, shifts in favor of nature. This shift becomes a cosmic tragedy which, so we feel, makes every ruin an object infused with our nostalgia; for now the decay appears as nature's revenge for the spirit's having violated it by making a form in its own image. The whole history of mankind is a gradual rise of the spirit to mastery over the nature which it finds outside, but in a certain sense also within, itself. If in the other arts the spirit bends the forms and events of this nature to its command, in architecture it shapes nature's masses and inherent forces until, as if of their own accord, they yield and the artistic conception is made visible. But the necessities of matter submit to the freedom of the spirit, and its vitality is expressed without residue in nature's merely weighing and carrying forces, only so long as the building remains perfect. The moment its decay destroys the unity of the form, nature and spirit separate

again and reveal their world-pervading original enmity—as if the artistic formation had only been an act of violence committed by the spirit to which the stone unwillingly submitted; as if it now gradually shook off this yoke and returned once more into the independent lawfulness of its own forces.

But this makes the ruin a more meaningful, more significant phenomenon than are the fragments of other destroyed works of art. A painting from which particles of paint have fallen off, a statue with mutilated limbs, an ancient text of poetry from which words or lines are lost—all of these have effect only according to what is still left in them of artistic formation or what the imagination can construe of it from these remnants. Their immediate appearance is no artistic unity; it offers us nothing but a work of art imperfect through the reductions it has undergone. The ruin of a building, however, means that where the work of art is dying, other forces and forms, those of nature, have grown; and that out of what of art still lives in the ruin and what of nature already lives in it, there has emerged a new whole, a characteristic unity. To be sure, from the standpoint of that purpose which the spirit has embodied in palace and church, castle and hall, aqueduct and memorial column, the form in which they appear when decayed is a meaningless incident. Yet a new meaning seizes on this incident, comprehending it and its spiritual form in a unity which is no longer grounded in human purposiveness but in that depth where human purposiveness and the working of non-conscious natural forces grow from their common root. For this reason a good many Roman ruins, however interesting they may be otherwise, lack the specific fascination of the ruin—to the extent, that is, to which one notices in them the destruction *by man*; for this contradicts the contrast between human work and the effect of *nature* on which rests the significance of the ruin as such.

Such a contradiction is engendered not only by man's positive action but also by his passivity when (and because) he strikes us as an element of mere nature. This characterizes a good many urban ruins, like those, still inhabited, often found in Italy off the main road. In these cases, what strikes us is not, to be sure, that human beings destroy the work of man—this indeed is achieved by nature—but that men *let it decay*. From the standpoint of the idea of man, such indifference is, so to speak, a positive passivity, whereby man makes himself the accomplice of nature and of that one of its inherent tendencies which is dramatically opposed

to his own essential interests. Here the inhabited ruin loses for us that sensuous-suprasensuous balance of the conflicting tendencies of existence which we see in the abandoned one. This balance, indeed, gives it its problematical, unsettling, often unbearable character. Such places, sinking from life, still strike us as settings of a life.

In other words, it is the fascination of the ruin that here the work of man appears to us entirely as a product of nature. The same forces which give a mountain its shape through weathering, erosion, faulting, growth of vegetation, here do their work on old walls. Even the charm of alpine forms—which for the most part, after all, are clumsy, accidental, artistically insipid—rests on the felt counterplay of two cosmic tendencies: volcanic eruptions or gradual stratification have built the mountain upward; rain and snow, weathering and landslides, chemical dissolution and the effect of gradually intruding vegetation have sawed apart and hollowed out the upper ledge, have cast downward parts of what had been raised up, thus giving the contour its form. In this form, we thus feel the vitality of those opposing tendencies—and, instinctively sensing these antitheses in ourselves, we notice, beyond everything merely formal and aesthetic, the significance of the configuration in whose serene unity they have their synthesis.

In the ruin, these antitheses are distributed over even more widely segmented parts of existence. What has led the building upward is human will; what gives it its present appearance is the brute, downward-dragging, corroding, crumbling power of nature. Still, so long as we can speak of a ruin at all and not of a mere heap of stones, this power does not sink the work of man into the formlessness of mere matter. There rises a new form which, from the standpoint of nature, is entirely meaningful, comprehensible, differentiated. Nature has transformed the work of art into material for her own expression, as she had previously served as material for art.

According to its cosmic order, the hierarchy of nature and spirit usually shows nature as the substructure, so to speak, the raw material, or semi-finished product; the spirit, as the definitely formative and crowning element. The ruin reverses this order: what was raised by the spirit becomes the object of the same forces which form the contour of the mountain and the bank of the river. If in this way there emerges an aesthetic significance, it also ramifies into a metaphysical one, in the manner revealed

by patina on metal and wood, ivory and marble. In patina, too, a merely natural process is set off on the surface of a human product and makes for the outgrowth of a skin which completely covers up the original one. That the product becomes more beautiful by chemical and physical means; that what is willed becomes, unintentionally and unenforceably, something obviously new, often more beautiful, and once more self-consistent: this mysterious harmony is the fantastic fascination of patina which cannot be wholly accounted for by analyzing our perception of it.

This is the fascination of the ruin, too; but in addition, the ruin has another one of the same order: the destruction of the spiritual form by the effect of natural forces, that reversal of the typical order, is felt as a return to the "good mother," as Goethe calls nature. Here the saying that all that is human "is taken from earth and to earth shall return" rises above its sad nihilism. Between the not-yet and the no-longer lies an affirmation of the spirit whose path, it is true, now no longer ascends to its peak but, satiated by the peak's riches, descends to its home. This is, as it were, the counterpart of that "fruitful moment" for which those riches which the ruin has in retrospect are still in prospect. That the overwhelming of a work of the human will by the power of nature can have an aesthetic effect at all suggests that nature has a never completely extinguished rightful claim to this work, however much it may be formed by the spirit. In its material, its given state, it has always remained nature, and if now nature becomes once more completely mistress over it, she is merely exercising a right which until now has remained latent but which she never, so to speak, has renounced.

For this reason, the ruin strikes us so often as tragic—but not as sad—because destruction here is not something senselessly coming from the outside but rather the realization of a tendency inherent in the deepest layer of existence of the destroyed. For this reason, too, the aesthetically satisfying impression, which is associated with the tragedy or secret justice of destruction, is so often lacking when we describe a person as a "ruin." For even when we mean by this that the psychic layers we designate as natural in the narrower sense—the drives or inhibitions connected with the body, the inert, the accidental, that which points toward death—have become master over the specifically human, rationally valuable ones, we still do not feel that a latent right is being realized through these tendencies. Rather, such a right does not exist at all. We

believe—rightly or wrongly—that such derogations, inimical to the spirit, do *not* inhere in the nature of man in its deepest sense: they have a right to everything external that is born with him, but not to man himself. Reflections and complexities in other contexts aside, man as a ruin, therefore, is so often more sad than tragic, lacking that metaphysical calm which attaches to the decay of a material work as by virtue of a profound *a priori*.

When we speak of “returning home,” we mean to characterize the peace whose mood surrounds the ruin. And we must characterize something else: our sense that these two world potencies—the striving upward and the sinking downward—are working serenely together, as we envisage in their working a picture of purely natural existence. Expressing this peace for us, the ruin orders itself into the surrounding landscape without a break, growing together with it like tree and stone—whereas a palace, a villa, even a peasant house, even where they fit perfectly into the mood of their landscape, always stem from another order of things and blend with that of nature only as if in afterthought. Very old buildings in open country, and particularly ruins, often show a peculiar similarity of color to the tones of the soil around them. The cause of this must be somehow analogous to that which constitutes the charm of old fabrics, too: however heterogeneous their colors may have been when new, the long common destinies, dryness and moisture, heat and cold, outer wear and inner disintegration, which they have encountered through the centuries produce a unity of tint, a reduction to the same common denominator of color which no new fabric can imitate. In a similar way, the influences of rain and sunshine, the incursion of vegetation, heat, and cold must have assimilated the building abandoned to them to the color tone of the ground which has been abandoned to the same destinies. They have sunk its once conspicuous contrast into the peaceful unity of belonging.

The ruin conveys the impression of peace from yet another perspective. On the one side of that typical conflict stood the purely external form or symbolism of peace: the contour of the mountain as defined by the building up and the breaking down. But in respect to the other pole of existence, peace lives entirely within the human soul—that battlefield between nature, which the soul is itself, and spirit, which the soul is itself. The forces which one can designate only by the spatial simile of upward-striving are at work continuously in our soul, continuously in-

terrupted, deflected, overcome by other forces which work in us as what is dull, mean, "merely-natural." The way in which these two variously mingle in extent and manner yields, at every moment, the form of our soul. But neither by the most decisive victory of one of these two parties nor by their compromise does it ever arrive at a definitive state. For not only does the restless rhythm of the soul not tolerate it; but, more important, behind every single event, every single impulse that comes from one or the other of these two directions, there is something which lives on, and there are claims which the decision just made does not put to rest. This gives the antagonism between the two principles something unfinishable, formless, breaking every frame.

The unending demands of both principles impose on the soul an interminability of the moral process, a profound absence of a well-rounded organization palpably at rest. In this lies perhaps the ultimate formal ground of the animosity of aesthetic against ethical natures. Wherever we perceive aesthetically, we demand that the contradictory forces of existence be somehow in equilibrium, that the struggle between above and below have come to a standstill. But this form which yields only a *perception* is rejected by the ethical-psychic process with its unceasing up and down, its constant shifting of boundaries, with the inexhaustibility of the forces playing in it against one another.

By contrast, the profound peace which, like a holy charmed circle, surrounds the ruin, conveys a sense of this constellation: the obscure antagonism which determines the form of all existence—now acting among merely natural forces, now only within psychic life, and now, as in the present case, taking place between nature and matter. This antagonism—although here too it is in disequilibrium—letting one side preponderate as the other sinks into annihilation, nevertheless offers us a quietly abiding image, secure in its form. The aesthetic value of the ruin combines the disharmony, the eternal becoming of the soul struggling against itself, with the formal satisfaction, the firm limitedness of the work of art. For this reason, the metaphysical-aesthetic charm of the ruin disappears when not enough remains of it to let us feel the upward-leading tendency. The stumps of the pillars of the Forum Romanum are simply ugly and nothing else, while a pillar crumbled—say, halfway down—can generate a maximum of charm.

To be sure, we may well be inclined to ascribe this peacefulness to another motif: the character of the ruin as *past*. It is the site of

life from which life has departed—but this is nothing merely negative, added to it only by thought, as it is for the countless things which, once immersed in life and accidentally cast on its bank, are by their very nature capable of being again easily caught by its current. In the case of the ruin, the fact that life with its wealth and its changes once dwelled here constitutes an immediately perceived presence. The ruin creates the present form of a past life, not according to the contents or remnants of that life, but according to its past as such.

This also is the charm of antiquities, of which only a narrow-minded logic can assert that an absolutely exact imitation equals them in aesthetic value. No matter if we are deceived in an individual case: with this piece which we are holding in our hand, we command in spirit the entire span of time since its inception; the past with its destinies and transformations has been gathered into this instant of an aesthetically perceptible present. Here, as in the case of the ruin, with its extreme intensification and fulfillment of the present form of the past, such profound and comprehensive energies of our soul are brought into play that there is no longer any sharp division between perception and thought. Here psychic wholeness is at work—seizing, in the same way that its object fuses the contrast of present and past into one united form, on the whole span of physical and spiritual vision in the unity of aesthetic enjoyment which, after all, is always rooted in a deeper than merely aesthetic unity.

Thus purpose and accident, nature and spirit, past and present here resolve the tension of their contrasts—or, rather, preserving this tension, they yet lead to a unity of external image and internal effect. It is as though a segment of existence must collapse before it can become unresisting to all currents and powers coming from all corners of reality. Perhaps this is the reason for our general fascination with decay and decadence, a fascination which goes beyond what is merely negative and degrading. The rich and many-sided culture, the unlimited *impressionability*, and the understanding open to everything, which are characteristic of decadent epochs, do signify this coming together of all contradictory strivings. An equalizing justice connects the uninhibited unity of all things that grow apart and against one another with the decay of those men and works of men which now can only yield, but can no longer create and maintain their own forms out of their own strength.

[Translated by David Kettler]

HERBERT MORRIS

Burro

This is to be a simple celebration
to tell the unsplendid and unbeautiful
of that slow animal plodding the trails
for centuries beneath such swarthy sun
that, if it knew a tongue, would burn in Spanish.
This is to be the hot and white recital
of all the weathered shack and shanty places
from beaches on the Gulf south to the Andes
rank and stable-sour with his smell,
streaked with the color of the men who worked him.

This is to be, more fiercely, an alignment
with all the bleak and common of the world,
not questioning the missions and the cargoes
fraught with ravines and difficult with packs,
too ignorant to hate the heat of the day
or frolic in the shimmer of the rain,
not knowing what to do with happiness
except to carry it slung on the back
like any other beast, like any burden,
its life too thin to understand despair,
knowing in donkey only the word accept.

I think of the Central American republics
as wild fruit dangling tropic from a vine
suspended between a Pacific and Caribbean
spangling like fantasies on either side,
looped on a thousand sky and water threads
strung jungle to jungle twined to Panama:

green for the guava carved of Guatemala,
tart on the lips and pinkish in the meat;
Honduras and Nicaragua some great mango
lavish where its distention at the middle

seems to anticipate some pride of teeth
to be driven hard and printed bold upon it;
the small and bitter cassava of Salvador
boiled in the weedy broth of its Pacific;
and Costa Rica swaying like passionfruit
on the Parallel that sweeps to Puerto Limon
like a fret of wind or bloom across its cheek,
no name for it in letters back to Spain
other than ripeness which they wrote Rich Coast.

And what shall be said of the fruit of Mexico
thick in the flank and quite the vastest melon
flourishing brazen in that heat, that light,
golden and sweet and tapering gracefully
to a Latin wrist poised at Tehuantepec
for some stupendous gesture in the sun,
lucid and cool, profoundly magical:
a beckoning, a stunning invitation,
a click of the bone, an eminence like love.
What shall be said of all that Yucatan
passionate in a thrust of rind and flesh
splurged half across the Gulf of Mexico,
spending its seed like emeralds on a wind
scattering to the glittered feast of Indies
begun with the banana lettered Cuba.

What shall be said of all bright fruit itself,
exotic in the mind, real to the touch,
imitating the brilliant shape of perfect
merely by holding itself in readiness
for some keen fury in the seed's design,
a happening it merely can accede to,
mindless and idiot green from out its stem,
filled with a thousand suns all buzzing yes,
too purely physical to comprehend.

And what is to be said of the terraced slopes,
the orchards dozing ripe beneath the snowline,
burros clogging the roads into Tampico

burdened with avocados to be crated,
everywhere burros making for Mazatlan
sagging and splotched with orchids in their ears,
burros two hundred miles in winding columns
coated with dust and heading for Vera Cruz
with great papayas flashing on their backs.

The burros at rest in the ports, relieved of their packs,
a trough on the docks is hastily slammed together
where they shall take their cornmeal and their water
roiled with mosquitoes, silent and unaware
of the men and the boys laboring afternoons
shirtless and glistening, loading the freighters
not with the splendid fruit spelled Mexico
nor with the shapes of all those splayed republics,
but passing through their hands an angrier crop,
filling the fruitless holds with something human,
days of their years the color of the light
out to the futile harbors of the world,
a cargo of performance in the sun
plying the trackless sea-wastes of the night,

just as the burros trudging the mountain passes
pronounce a thirst too crude for the exotic,
saddled with animal and not mere fruit,
carting the burro in them on their backs.

And finally the men shall rest in the ports,
coiled on the wharves in a shell as deep as sleep
flecked with the colors submarine and shadowed,
sunk in the cool that leaks from their sombreros,
the burros rancid pillows for their heads,
slumber to soften their futility
and dream to stay the sorrow of their rounds.
Tonight they will down tequila and strum guitars,
drunk on the sweat they sucked across their wrists
rather than limes to compromise the sweetness,
fiercer than salt for deepening the tang.
And once again at morning to set out
squat on the burros, swollen with the sun,
jogging three days returning to their village.

I have seen them stepping delicately but strong
walking the bones that pave those broken trails,
crossing at noon to South America
over the rotted skulls strewn on the Isthmus,
Panama battered open by the sun,
hacked into splinters like a dazzling graveyard
blown by decay and splattered on the air.
I have seen them bridge the fable of history
unflinching as they trod the skeletons
nor retching sour cornmeal to the earth
picking their way among the chalky shards.

I have seen a burro turn to sniff the air
over the foothills of Colombia,
wanting it burro smarting in his nostrils
rather than coffee heavy in the trees.
I have seen him on the banks of the Magdalena
attracted by the shadow on the river
following him from Tunja to Bucaramanga,
his image bobbing muddy down the rapids:
and deeply dreamt him scrutinizing burro
and not the beetles walking on the water.

I have felt the stone of the sun along his back
merely by weighing the light that stings my tongue
saying the sails that whipped the sumptuous Main
and slashed the air with voyage like a flame
hammering out the water and the light,
pronouncing Cartagena and Barranquilla
wanting the taste of ports to rinse my mouth
brighter than wine or the breath of the continent,
seeking to say the pure expenditure,
touching a gift the texture of sheer cost,

ashamed for him with an impoverishment
compounded by the syllables of burro,
hurt for the sure-of-foot but uncommitted,
the tropic wasted on him, all that Spanish.

And I have seen him down the spine of Andes
mined as the men and mountains have been mined,

drawing white sisal hemp through Ecuador
from the interior to Guayaquil,
hauling the drums of oil out of Peru
in marches to the tankers off Callao,
crossing Bolivia with copper and tin
to be processed at the smelters near La Paz,
going the bleaching desert-wastes of Chile
bearded with salt in teams that bear the nitrates
of mines from Tarapaca to Valdivia;
and farther south into Tierra del Fuego
ridden by shepherds through the grassy wastes
marking the end of the continent at Cape Horn,
the end of the journey, barren and desolate,
allowed only to feel the southern wind
and sense the paradox of hemisphere,
its tears too dumb to weep the polar frost.

And I have seen him used by that same force
that worked the men who work him in their turn,
centuries driven naked in the sun
that commerce and the building of white cities
soon be admitted to the vocabularies
imminent on the mouths like those rich plums
maddened to purple straining to be tasted,
clearing the coasts and mapping out the jungles,
staunch as a species, stained and durable,
submissive should the payment for his labors
await him in the troughs of the republics
roiled with mosquitoes, dark in the guitars,
drunk on the sweat they sucked across their wrists
rather than limes to compromise the sweetness,
fiercer than salt for deepening the tang.
And once again at morning to set out
squat on the burros, swollen with the sun,
jogging three days returning to their village.

B. L. REID

Yeats and Tragedy

EARLY IN HIS "Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Tragedy," Gilbert Murray outlined a "normal sequence" of the successive movements of the "original Dionysus Mystery," the primitive Eniautos-celebrations, which follow the "normal pattern for the fate of the Year-Daimon" or Year-Spirit: "Agon, Pathos, Messenger, Threnos, Theophany, or, we might say, Anagnorisis and Theophany." At the end of his essay Murray anglicized his "normal sequence" as "Contest, Tearing-Asunder, Messenger, Lamentation, Discovery, Recognition, and Resurrection." The sequence is a figurative dramatization of brute facts of life, and an effort to control those facts by group practice of mimetic magic: life is sustained by the fertility of the earth, which is in turn subject to the cyclical flux of the seasons, waxing and waning—"Keeping his seasons and rages," to adapt a perfectly harmonious phrase of Eliot's from "The Dry Salvages." The center of the ritual symbolism is the analogy between the four-part division of the year, Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter, and, wishfully, Spring again, and the "seasons" of man's life, youth, maturity, old age, death, and, wishfully, rebirth. Just as the twenty-four-hour day-night performs in microcosm the rhythm of the year, so the life of one man performs in microcosm the rhythm of the life of the race.

I would suggest the thesis that the poems of W. B. Yeats, taken as a whole, draw a design substantially identical to the design of the Dionysus-mystery which is the primitive original of tragedy; and two hypotheses: first, that the original tragic design is still the governing design of "systematic" tragedy—the codified dramatic form and literary concept; second, that any fully serious order of thought or of art, not utterly idealistic or utterly fatalistic, will likewise almost helplessly reproduce the ideological configuration expressed in the "normal sequence" of archetypal tragic ritual—thus that this ritual ordains the great "normative" pattern of serious human thought.

My thesis I hope to demonstrate. My two hypotheses I have no hope of proving, and I throw them out as matters of personal con-

viction and grounds for argument. The first of them is quite unoriginal, and has been developed by Murray and Herbert Weisinger, among others. The second may or may not be original, and it is probably undemonstrable. I almost hope so; for, like Murray's suspicions as to the innate limitation of tragic subject matter, it strikes me as a "terrifying" hypothesis—implying our helpless lack of originality in thought, and our helpless incapacity to "do" anything about the conduct of life. Still, it seems to me "indicated," though probably undemonstrable, and certainly horrible.

One thing which is certain, in any case, is the interrelationship of "systematic" or formal tragedy and "generic" tragedy, the philosophical or "sub-philosophical" sense of life.¹ The first is a sophistication, a tailoring and projection, of the second; in the amalgam of "systematic" tragedy, "generic" tragedy supplies the subject matter to be subjected to the plastic ordering of drama. I note with some sense of shock, as a small instance of our helpless philosophical mimicry, that my own antithesis-synthesis comes to the same thing as the formula of Nietzsche: "Tragedy is the Apollonian embodiment of Dionysiac insights and powers." He speaks of what I am calling "systematic" tragedy—Apollonian systematizing of Dionysiac or "generic" intuitions. But the "generic" tragic sense of life gets itself uttered in art forms other than the dramatic; and that is where Yeats and his lyrics come in. And yet the Yeatsian "generic" tragedy proves to fall into patterns notably like those of dramatic tragedy; and this leads us to the interesting multiple union: the ritual-generic, the systematic-dramatic, and the Yeatsian-lyrical all appear to roll themselves up into a ball—particolored, but still one ball—of philosophical significance.

Murray has proved the detailed survival of the primitive ritual elements in the Greek tragic plays, and the very familiarity of the names he gives to the stages in the ritual sequence makes the point, too. Seeing the plays in the context of the ritual order reminds us, as we tend to forget, that the typical Greek tragic ending was relatively "soft." Only relatively; but, judging by the single plays of Euripides, the *Oedipus at Colonus* of Sophocles, and by the ending of the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus, the only extant complete trilogy, it does appear that the Greek tragedians habitually lightened their tragic actions somewhat with a Theophany at the end, promising either

¹ I borrow the terms "systematic" and "sub-philosophical" from an important article by Richard B. Sewall, "The Tragic Form", *Essays in Criticism*, IV, 345-358.

the restored benevolence of the gods, or, as in the case of Oedipus, the actual apotheosis of the tragic hero.

If we accept Shakespeare as the norm, as he certainly is the giant, of "modern" tragedy, the case is different, and harsher. The general ritual resemblance continues, but what Shakespeare does is to adopt the logic but to telescope the units of the Eniautos-sequence. Of the primitive Greek order—of Contest, Tearing-Asunder, Messenger, Lamentation, Discovery, Recognition, and Resurrection—the Messenger and the Lamentation (the least organic of the Greek elements) tend to disappear as formal members of the Shakespearean sequence. The Contest and the Tearing-Asunder remain to compose the bulk of the tragic action. The Resurrection disappears in its Greek sense of a supernatural manifestation of power and benevolence. But it reappears, reduced and secularized, to join with the Discovery (of tragic truth) and the Recognition (of tragic guilt and error), in the final complex cathartic effect of the great Shakespearean endings: the effect we commonly call "Reconciliation." The Reconciliation, I take it, involves the humble confession of fallibility, the admission of inadequacy and of the wrongness of pride, submission to the rightness and power of a "moral order," or "secret cause," or, perhaps, "a divinity that shapes our ends"—though Reconciliation certainly does not occur in Shakespeare in any simple *mea culpa*, take-me-to-heaven sense. When Horatio says, at the end of *Hamlet*, "Good night, sweet prince, / And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!", nobody understands the speech literally. Hamlet, Lear, Othello, Macbeth, Brutus, Antony, are all "Dead, dead, dead!" and we know the fact is tragic and not to be salvaged by any thought of apotheosis. They are "reconciled" and "reconstituted"—too late—before death, but not "resurrected," not other than fatally dead.

But neither in the Greeks, nor, certainly, in modern tragedy can we find a true equivalent survival of that important "special final peripeteia, from grief to joy" of the ritual, the disappearance of which puzzled Murray, and which he finally decided must have been embodied in the satyr-play, the fourth member of the early Greek tragic tetralogies. I am going to suggest that in the poems of Yeats we can find just such a peripeteia, "from grief to joy," that his last poems—with their sensuality, and all those emotional and technical hyperboles which we can group and call apocalyptic passion—have to be seen as a quite literal lyric equivalent of the

satyr-play. But I have maintained that the total design of Yeats's generic-tragic lyrics reproduces the total design of primitive tragedy, and of that systematic tragedy which follows the basic sequence of the ritual. We must first demonstrate this large general resemblance, and then fit the satyr-element into the big picture.

The main lines of argument are suggested by my proposed categories of Yeatsian passion: Defence, Joy, Innocence, Apocalypse; or by a cardinal prose text such as, "To me the supreme aim is an act of faith and reason to make one rejoice in the midst of tragedy"; or by a cardinal poetic text such as, "All things fall and are built again,/And those that build them again are gay." The Yeatsian version of the tragic sequence includes Agon, Pathos, Threnos, Anagnorisis, and Theophany—except that the god who manifests himself is man. In more familiar terms, it includes Suffering, Opposition, Reconciliation, Transmutation, and Transcendence. To "rejoice in the midst of tragedy" is to transmute tragic fact into its opposite. "All things fall" confesses tragic fact; "and are built again" asserts transmutation of tragic fact, man's adequacy to it; "those that build them again are gay" asserts transcendence of tragic fact, man's superiority to it. We may try to recall and redistribute in their significant sequence those statements from Yeats's prose and poetry which will show most compactly the logic of his thought about tragedy.

Everything begins with the negative pole of the tragic antinomy: the confession of *lachrymae rerum*, the immanence of suffering, the strict equation drawn between tragedy and "life"—life *is* tragedy. This recognition follows hard upon the corollary rejection of the "dream" of happiness and well-being and the perfectibility of things as a normative or even possible condition:

Children play at being great and wonderful people, at the ambitions they will put away for one reason or another before they grow into ordinary men and women. Mankind as a whole had a like dream once; everybody and nobody built up the dream bit by bit, and the ancient story-tellers are there to make us remember what mankind would have been like, had not fear and the failing will and the laws of nature tripped up its heels.

The true condition of life is very different:

We seek reality with the slow toil of our weakness and are smitten from the boundless and the unforeseen. Only when we are saint or sage, and renounce Experience itself, can we, in the language of the Christian

Caballa, leave the sudden lightning and the path of the serpent and become the bowman who aims his arrow at the center of the sun.

We begin fairly, in the confidence of strength and beauty,

*But a raving autumn shears
Blossom from the summer's wreath.*

Life is "disaster," a discipline of constantly new disaster, and merely following the rhythm of disastrous events is enough to make an artist constantly "original":

It is not permitted to a man, who takes up pen or chisel, to seek originality, for passion is his only business, and he cannot but mould or sing after a new fashion because no disaster is like another.

Only a sentimental and dishonest art can deny these facts of life: all "happy art" expresses the "hollow image of fulfilled desire"; though it is true that if we abstract ourselves sufficiently from the brute processes of being, we can sustain the illusion of beneficence: "The food of the spiritual-minded is sweet, but passionate minds love bitter food."

Acceptance of the discipline of disaster constitutes initiation into tragic maturity—the only true maturity: "We begin to live when we have conceived life as tragedy." Initiated tragic man now turns about and begins to feed upon the tragic fact which tries to devour him. As he counters all that would deprive him, he becomes for the first time fully alive, and that creative abrasion sharpens his edge and polishes his metal. One recalls Hopkins'

*sheer plod makes plow down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.*

More prosaically, Yeats puts it,

The poet finds his mask in disappointment, the hero in defeat. The desire that is satisfied is not a great desire, nor has the shoulder used all its might that an unbreakable gate has never strained.

Tragic man begins to feel an actual hunger for "harsh facts, for ugly surprising things, for all that defies our hope." And gradually he acquires an active distaste for the "sweet food" of the sentimentalists and rhetoricians of shorter vision: "this hateful cheerfulness." He comes to see the pattern of all experience, even love, as "tragic war." He opposes that remorseless dialectic with all the resources

of human passion: "passion ennobled by intensity, by endurance, by wisdom"; thus, by violent activity, by rocky obduracy, by attempts to pierce the mystery of the "Mothers of Being, whose names are Wish, Will, Woe." By turns he practices the passionate intensity of the Swordsman, Usheen or Cuchulain, countering the retreat from reality of the Saint; the endurance of the Fisherman, or Landor or Swift; the mystical insights of Blake, or Robartes or Ribh. He resolves to "die blaspheming," flourishing his indomitable will. Such comfort as he has comes from the sense of splendid commitment of the "fanatic heart":

*Whatever flames upon the night
Man's own resinous heart has fed.*

His heart, like Gloucester's, "bursts smilingly." Yeats draws up a full program of behavior for the tragic initiate, one that will carry him out of the childhood of sentiment, through the life of creative conflict, to death in the free air, destroyed but not defeated:

*No longer in Lethean foliage caught,
Begin the preparation for your death
And from the fortieth winter by that thought
Test every work of intellect or faith,
And everything that your own hands have wrought,
And call those works extravagance of breath
That are not suited for such men as come
Proud, open-eyed and laughing to the tomb.*

Now the passion gradually calms and cools. The opposition continues, but it is differently based and more temperately expressed. The tragic initiate moves toward poise and peace. He has reached both resignation to tragic fact and a new sort of confidence, a sense of personal adequacy, as he sees he has not been spiritually killed by either the deprivation or the conflict. He is ready for his reconciliation. This is the cathartic state, purged of pity and fear, the effectual end of most systematic tragedy. This state of cleansed emptiness comes with the confession of nothingness:

I shall find the dark grow luminous, the void fruitful when I understand
I have nothing, that the ringers in the tower have appointed for the
hymen of the soul a passing bell.

It is an empty state, but not a quiescent one; the purification of suffering has cleared an entrance to new creativity:

He only can create the greatest imaginable beauty who has endured all imaginable pangs, for only when we have seen and foreseen what we dread shall we be rewarded by that dazzling unforeseen wing-footed wanderer.

Yeats, as tragic initiate, "reconciled" to tragic truth, now makes a return upon reality, newly seen. He posits a kind of folk-truth, or blood-wisdom, higher than logic, and running so deeply in the long racial underground of "emotional continuity" as to be out of reach even of tragic fatalism. "We suck always at the eternal dugs."

The abstract is not life and everywhere draws out its contradictions. You can refute Hegel but not the Saint or the Song of Sixpence.

...

*doubtless plum or cherry-branch
Sweetens the little half-way house
Those Chinamen climb towards, and I
Delight to imagine them seated there;
There, on the mountain and the sky,
On all the tragic scene they stare.
One asks for mournful melodies;
Accomplished fingers begin to play.
Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,
Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay.*

This deep peace rests upon the greatest anagnorisis of all, the recognition that beauty is defined, made real, brought into being, only by the shocking contact with the ugly—the great paradox of joy out of suffering, fertility out of decay, the Lion and the Honeycomb:

*'Fair and foul are near of kin,
And fair needs foul,' I cried.
'My friends are gone, but that's a truth
Nor grave nor bed denied,
Learned in bodily lowliness
And in the heart's pride.

'A woman can be proud and stiff
When on love intent;*

*But Love has pitched his mansion in
The place of excrement;
For nothing can be sole or whole
That has not been rent.'*

So says Crazy Jane to the Bishop. With a requisite "intensity," Keats wrote, "all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth." So in Yeats's thought fair and foul, loss and gain, take on the sadly beautiful unanimity of being simply "true," simply "life." One accepts them equally with a clean satisfaction beyond bitterness: "What matter if the ditches are impure?/ What matter if I live it all once more?" "I am content to live it all again/ And yet again, if it be life."

*I had wild Jack for a lover;
Though like a road
That men pass over
My body makes no moan
But sings on:
All things remain in God.*

But this purgative state, which is the pinnacle of systematic tragedy, serves Yeats as a plateau, a place of rest and reconstitution, more than passive, potentially fertile, looking toward that "joy which is the other side of sorrow." "That shaping joy has kept the sorrow pure."

Thus far in the Yeatsian sequence, all energy has been defensive energy, spent in patching against the tide of negative energies washing out from *lachrymae rerum*. In the phase of reconciliation, positive and negative energies stand off in virtual equilibrium; now the "shaping joy" which purifies sorrow tips the balance, the defensive energy turns to attack, and the process of transmutation, which will come to triumph in the phase of transcendence, has begun. Having survived the tragic discipline, the initiate starts up excitedly from his purgation and begins actively to impose his will on life. He has learned how to sublimate and how, variously, to "master" the processes of being. His "mastery" is the assertion of an absurdity, and deep inside he knows that too. He practices the absurdity because psychically it "works"—keeps him sane, makes life possible. The illusion of mastery is a powerful one, capable, in all but the darkest nights of the soul, of concealing its own falseness.

Yeats's tragic joy laughs in a variety of tones. Rarely, it speaks a kind of nihilistic abnegation, hollow and sardonic, as in

*Irrational streams of blood are staining earth;
Empedocles has thrown all things about;
Hector is dead and there's a light in Troy;
We that look on but laugh in tragic joy.*

Also rarely, it is an egotistic cackle, absconding from the contest, or asserting the imperviousness of his own aesthetic fabrications, the superiority of art to life:

*What's riches to him
That has made a great peacock
With the pride of his eye?
.....
Live he or die
Amid wet rocks and heather,
His ghost will be gay
Adding feather to feather
For the pride of his eye.*

It may express only a stoical obduracy:

*Bred to a harder thing
Than Triumph, turn away
And like a laughing string
Whereon mad fingers play
Amid a place of stone,
Be secret and exult,
Because of all things known
That is most difficult.*

More often and more deeply, his joy is a dynamic, transforming emotion, a gaiety "transfiguring all that dread." Synge's fine "astringent joy" is of that essence, associated with "strength" and "hardness," but heightening or lightening those adamants, and setting them to the attack. Tragic man shows his wounds as emblems of victory, not defeat:

*Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress.*

This is the basic tragic joy, the resurrection of the free-standing spirit from the ground of disaster:

*And I would have all know that when all falls
In ruin, poetry calls out in joy,
Being the scattering hand, the bursting pod,
The victim's joy among the holy flame.*

Yeats speaks in the ancient phoenix-imagery of overmastering fertility and rejuvenation. This spiritual transmutation of empirical disaster accumulates, ultimately and paradoxically, a humility and selflessness that is toughened by a reasserted egotism more racial than personal, braving the worst that fate can offer. Yeats himself locates this spiritual complex in the ends of Shakespeare's tragedies; and Bradley, too, felt there an extra-Aristotelian emotion and called it "exultation." It is an affirmation beyond the relative neutrality of catharsis. Perhaps we do have to list this among the great standard emotions of "systematic" tragedy, though to me it seems much more typically Shakespearean than Greek:

Shakespeare's persons, when the last darkness has gathered about them, speak out of the ecstasy that is one half the self-surrender of sorrow, and one half the last playing and mockery of the victorious sword, before the defeated world. . . . Timon of Athens contemplates his own end, and orders his tomb by the beachy margent of the flood, and Cleopatra sets the asp to her bosom, and their words move us because their sorrow is not their own at tomb or asp, but for all men's fate. That shaping joy has kept the sorrow pure. . . .

Yeats's location of the roots of this emotion in "generic" tragedy, in one's very sense of life, of "all men's fate," is expressed in this passage generalizing on the evidence of Synge:

. . . he contemplates even his own death as it were another's and finds in his own destiny but as it were a projection through a burning glass of that general to men. There is in the creative joy an acceptance of what life brings, because we have understood the beauty of what it brings, or a hatred of death for what it takes away, which arouses within us, through some sympathy perhaps with all other men, an energy so noble, so powerful, that we laugh aloud and mock, in the terror or the sweetness of our exaltation, at death and oblivion.

Finally, the transcendental impulse of the Yeatsian tragic joy is caught in the sexual-philosophical metaphor of *The Herne's Egg*:

*Strong sinew and soft flesh
Are foliage round the shaft
Before the arrowsmith
Has stripped it, and I pray
That I, all foliage gone,
May shoot into my joy.*

Yeats's extra-tragic phase of transcendence, like his phase of joy, continues the affirmative counter-attack upon life; and like his joy, it appears in many forms. Once his joy reaches that elevation he calls "ecstatic," it behaves variously: it may be very calm or very excited. When calm it lives in the condition of "innocence"; in its state of excitement it develops the Yeatsian equivalent of the satyr-play which is the raffish and extravagant *coda* of the tragic tetralogy.

Yeats found that he entered the state which was not quite love, but "more like innocence," when he "ceased to hate." This variety of transcendence must be called a kind of emotionless emotion, "beyond tears and laughter," of evacuated motives, beyond the self, "the other side of tragedy"; poems of such mood he called in a letter "all emotion and all impersonal." The metaphor of his own which best catches the state of transcendent innocence is his comment on the passage in *Richard II*,

*Let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings;*

"Do you not feel there the wide-open eyes?" he asks. The tragic initiate is carried "beyond grief into pure contemplation," into a state Yeats does finally call, inclusively, "love," "a form of the eternal contemplation of what is." The condition may approach "trance":

Tragic art, passionate art, the drowner of dykes, the confounder of understanding, moves us by setting us to reverie, by alluring us almost to the intensity of trance. The persons upon the stage . . . greatness till they are humanity itself. We feel our minds expand convulsively or spread out slowly like some moon-brightened, image-crowded sea. That which is before our eyes perpetually vanishes and returns again in the midst of the excitement it creates, and the more enthralling it is, the more do we forget it.

In that condition, "passion becomes wisdom." "What is" is still

brutally paradoxical: "Love has pitched his mansion in/ The place of excrement"; and still infallibly tragic: "that discourtesy of death." But the great ineluctable tragic evidences have taken on an air of distance and unreality, muted and blurred in the great fusions of "life" and of "truth":

*Till the wreck of body,
Slow decay of blood,
Testy delirium
Or dull decrepitude,
Or what worse evil come—
The death of friends, or death
Of every brilliant eye
That made a catch in the breath—
Seem but the clouds of the sky
When the horizon fades;
Or a bird's sleepy cry
Among the deepening shades.*

"Our traditions only permit us to bless," now says the tragic initiate, artist or Everyman, "for the arts are an extension of the beatitudes." He concludes that there is only one possible ultimate emotion, "the emotion of multitude": "We are blest by everything." At the end all that is required of him is song; he becomes an anonymous voice "set upon a golden bough to sing." He may sing the crazy anthem of the old hermit:

*While he'd rummaged rags and hair,
Caught and cracked his flea, the third,
Giddy with his hundredth year,
Sang unnoticed like a bird.*

On his dignity, his song will be "bird songs of an old man, joy in the passing moment, emotion without the bitterness of memory," "a last song, sweet and exultant, a sort of . . . *geeta*, not doctrine but song." (*The Tempest* was Shakespeare's *geeta*.) What he sings of, out of "the artifice of eternity," to "lords and ladies of Byzantium," is transmuted and transcended actuality—"what is past, or passing, or to come."

This "wide-eyed," entranced, depersonalized, passionless "contemplation of what is" is one of the three last reaches of Yeats's mode of tragic transcendence. The other two, his rowdy sensuality

and the complex of his apocalyptic hyperboles—of theme, image, speech, and music—are passionate indeed; and they compose the Yeatsian satyr-play, Murray's "special final peripeteia" in the tragic sequence, asserting the resurrection of the human spirit in renewed wholeness, ready to "live it all again." It is a return, with a sense of deep identification and in a mood of high excitement, to the oldest bases of being. Again we have to think of the primitive Dionysiac component in Nietzsche's synthesis, which speaks the first and last word in formal tragedy, and submits only medially and grudgingly to the Apollonian plasticizing, in order that it may find an intelligible idiom; after which it "seeks to escape back into primordial reality." So with these last great wild satyr-play poems of Yeats. In their fertility ritual, "an old man's frenzy," but splendid and imposing, the primordial reality to which return is made is the heart, for Yeats the seed-bed of passion, creativity, and courage.

*I sought a theme and sought for it in vain,
I sought it daily for six weeks or so.
Maybe at last, being but a broken man,
I must be satisfied with my heart . . .*

The return is to the "dung of passion," but dung in its archetypal duality of decay and fertility:

*Now that my ladder's gone,
I must lie down where all the ladders start,
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.*

The note of pathos those passages sound is relevant but not central. The Dionysiac chorus of satyrs, says Nietzsche, sang and danced "the metaphysical solace that, despite every phenomenal change, life is indestructibly joyful and powerful." So, again, with the satyr-lyrics of Yeats. They may sing "an old, foul tune," celebrating the athletic sexuality of the "gay, warty lads":

*Down the mountain walls
From where Pan's cavern is
Intolerable music falls.
Foul goat-head, brutal arm appear,
Belly, shoulder, bum,
Flash fishlike; nymphs and satyrs
Copulate in the foam.*

But the foul tune is actually primitive-religious, aiming to dramatize the metaphysical solace of indestructible fertility and joy. And it carries with it the elevating conviction that in some mysterious way the lust of the body and the lust of the soul are deeply kin:

One feels at moments as if one could with a touch convey a vision—that the mystic way and sexual love use the same means—opposed yet parallel existences.

The satyr-poems speak a marrow-bone wisdom, cruder and tougher and more ancient than the cerebral:

*God guard me from the thoughts men think
In the mind alone;
He that sings a lasting song
Thinks in a marrow-bone.*

Its speech is extravagant, the images strange, the music cacophonous and wild; when "all is in the wine cup," the grapes do "begin to stammer":

*. . . this pragmatical, preposterous pig of a world, its farrow that so solid
seem,
Must vanish on the instant if the mind but change its theme.*

. . .

*Malachi Stilt-Jack am I, whatever I learned has run wild,
From collar to collar, from stilt to stilt, from father to child.
All metaphors, Malachi, stilts and all. A barnacle goose
Far up in the stretches of night; night splits and the dawn breaks loose;
I, through the terrible novelty of light, stalk on, stalk on;
Those great sea-horses bare their teeth and laugh at the dawn.*

Stephen Spender, who reacts, like Auden, ambivalently to Yeats—scornful of his philosophy but grateful for his technical poetic instruction—makes the outright charge that

Yeats's poetry is devoid of any unifying moral subject, and it develops in a perpetual search for one. Although he has much wisdom, he offers no philosophy of life, but, as a substitute, a magical system, which, where it does not seem rhetorical, is psycho-analytic, but not socially constructive.²

² *The Destructive Element*, Jonathan Cape, Ltd., London, 1935.

In his evaluation of *Words for Music Perhaps*, especially of the lyrical sequences of Crazy Jane and Tom the Lunatic, Walter E. Houghton picks up these judgments of Spender as a focus for his own commentary. The force of Spender's attack, he concludes, is "vitiated by overstatement"; but, if the criticism is distorted, "it is the distortion of a truth, for *Words for Music Perhaps* is indeed devoid of any unifying moral subject, and for that reason it is not socially constructive."³ The ground of Houghton's agreement with Spender is made clear in this paragraph:

For all his citation of Sophocles and Shakespeare, Yeats produces a very different tragic effect. Because the hero is not at war with evil, within or without, we cannot feel that profound sense of pity and terror which comes from witnessing a world of moral disorder. On the contrary we "rejoice in every happiness that comes to him, and sorrow at his death as if it were our own." This is hardly the mood of tragic catharsis. It is the mood which Yeats, in 1938, rightly defines as the mood of his plays, "tragic ecstasy". . . .

I do not wholly understand the judgments of these two men, and insofar as I do understand them, I mainly disagree with them. Not without gratitude: Mr. Houghton's essay, especially, is one of the most intelligent and helpful of all the published studies of Yeats; but I do feel moved to dispute some of these premises, hoping thereby to come closer to understanding and evaluating Yeats and his practice of tragedy.

Whether Spender is writing in 1934 from his specifically Marxist base makes little difference; it is accurate enough if we say he attacks Yeats on vaguely Christian-Socialist or "humane" grounds. The basic equation he draws is between "morality" and "social-constructivism." Yeats has no philosophy of life and no unifying morality because his system is not "socially constructive." Houghton's argument is allied but a good deal more complicated. He is wrong, to my way of thinking, because he thinks too narrowly here about both morality and tragedy. Implicitly, he posits a *proper* tragic subject, tragic conflict, and tragic emotion: "a world of moral disorder," a "war with evil," a "mood of tragic catharsis." Yeats is at fault, morally at fault, in his handling of all three ele-

³ This and subsequent quotations from Mr. Houghton are taken from his article "Yeats and Crazy Jane: The Hero in Old Age," *Modern Philology*, XL, 316-329, copyright 1943 by the University of Chicago.

ments, subject, conflict, and emotion. It is by quarreling with their definitions that I would hope to refute both Spender and Houghton.

Spender argues that that only is moral which is socially constructive—to which we must agree; but he further implies that only that which works programmatically at large-scale social amelioration is socially constructive. Looked at from that strict point of view, Yeats's thought may indeed appear cold, abstracted, idiosyncratic, egotistic, inhumane. But the key to the rebuttal of those charges is to be found in the falseness of Spender's dichotomy, "psycho-analytic, but not socially constructive." If we can agree that psycho-analysis is anti-social, or non-social, then Yeats is guilty as charged; but that case seems to me absurd. Of course psycho-analysis aims to be socially constructive: it aims to understand and reconstitute the sick individual and send him back, healed, into society, to clean and strengthen the social fabric by cleaning and strengthening the individuals who compose it. And Yeats's personalized, individuated, and admittedly highly eccentric approach to man and society has the same implicit program.

I suspect that Yeats differs from Spender, not morally, but practically: in the quantity of his hope—his far lesser optimism—and on grounds of ways and means. Unquestionably there was in Yeats a taint of the snob and the egotist. But these were not his deepest dye, which was humanistic and idealistic—ambitious for the race, not merely for the ego. "The persons upon the stage," he writes, "greaten till they are humanity itself." He was concerned with "all men's fate," with the problems "general to men," and believed that the noblest personal energy rose out of "sympathy with all other men." Yeats did, after all, try passionately to understand man and history. Doubtless he falsified both; any "systematizing" does. You do not really understand man by "classifying" him, even if you cut your two "tinctures" into twenty-eight "phases" and churn those with four whirling "faculties"—but neither do you degrade and insult him. I should say Yeats's attempt is less crude than most, it is full of valuable insight, and it is certainly not *morally* culpable; whatever its eccentricities, they are humanistic rather than egoistic.

In shifting from the Aristotelian base, according to Mr. Houghton, Yeats produces "a very different tragic effect." Implicitly in Houghton's view Yeats's very different tragedy is inferior, and explicitly it is "amoral." In Yeatsian tragedy, "the hero is not at war

with evil," instead the tragic subject is that of the "heroic psychology of self-surrender and self-assertion." Because the subject is not that of the universal moral welfare, the Yeatsian tragic emotion is not true catharsis, but a more intimate and lesser sentimental involvement and identification. At only one period, says Houghton, does Yeats show a "full awareness of evil"—the nightmare period of the Great War and the Irish Revolution, roughly 1915-1922, when he wrote such poems as "The Second Coming," "Meditations in Time of Civil War," and "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen." These poems, Houghton agrees, are "great tragic odes," but their pity and terror is not "purified" because there is no "counteraffirmation."

"The growing murderousness of the world" stands unchallenged; no hero faces "the Savage God". . . Overwhelmed by this nightmare vision, Yeats could only revolt with a "rage to end all things." Had he come through this period of despair and, with renewed faith in the heroism latent in man, still held fast to the moral problem, he would have created a tragic art in the same kind as Shakespeare's; but after the recoil toward mysticism he returned to the earlier mode of heroic art, however deepened and widened. . . What he did find was an amoral faith in the heroic man.

The argument is persuasive, but it rests upon assumptions with which we are not bound to agree. Certainly it would have shocked Yeats as a description of himself. If Yeats's "amoral" philosophy was what Houghton says it was, then it was not what Yeats thought it was. It was Yeats who posited a "Vision of Evil," and made the vision a criterion of greatness in art. He wrote of Shelley in *A Vision*:

He lacked the Vision of Evil, could not conceive of the world as a continual conflict, so, though great poet he certainly was, he was not of the greatest kind.

Yeats and Houghton are operating with different definitions of evil, and so Yeats thinks he has the vision, and Houghton thinks he has it not.

What Houghton means by evil he does not make plain, and he seems to assume that we will understand him. I take it he means evil in the Christian sense of sin and wrongdoing, contrary to the laws of God, perpetrated by individuals or groups. Yeats recognized evil in that sense, and occasionally, as in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," it formed his tragic subject—as Houghton says. But the evil of "The Second Coming," the evil of "The blood-dimmed

tide is loosed, and everywhere/ The ceremony of innocence is drowned," symbolized by the great "rough beast" surrounded by the "indignant desert birds" of that fable—that is a different essence, and closer to what he means by the Vision of Evil. This is cosmic evil, that of "irrational streams of blood staining earth," of what W. M. Dixon called the "moral offensiveness" of the organization of things, and Nietzsche called "the antagonism at the heart of the world"; in Yeats's words, that in the cosmic order which "defies our hope." It was this cosmic enmity to man which defined full evil for Yeats. It is what he meant by "the world as a continual conflict" in the sentence on Shelley; Shelley, a "Godwin perfectibility man," to adapt Keats's description of their friend Dilke, had not grown up to that tragic truth.

This Yeatsian evil is not Christian, and I suppose one could say, technically, in that it is not subject to a right-wrong code of conduct, that it is not a "moral" concept. But surely it is as fatal as any other evil, and is as genuinely philosophical, if not as familiarly theological. And to say that Yeatsian tragedy is "amoral" because it does not conduct the "war with evil" in standard terms, seems to me to emasculate both tragedy and morality. The true distinguishing fact again is Yeats's eccentric humanism: he wrote a humanist tragedy about a humanist evil rooted in a humanist morality.

Mr. Houghton's statements that Yeats offers "no counteraffirmation"; that "the growing murderousness of the world" stands unchallenged; no hero faces 'the Savage God'; that he "could only revolt with a 'rage to end all things'"—all these seem to me to make errors of fact that need to be challenged. Yeats revolted in many ways other than that of nihilistic rage—in a great variety of counteraffirmations: in varieties of acceptance, the "eternal contemplation of what is," the "bird songs of an old man," his *geeta*, "sweet and sorrowful," all his "beatitudes"; in varieties of defiance, his "old man's frenzy," his Fisherman's toughness and his Swordsman's dynamic violence, his indomitable willingness to "live it all again, if it be life"; in varieties of transcendence, all those "ladders" rising out of the "foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart," all those "praises of joyous life," the poems of "tragic joy" in which "soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing/ For every tatter in its mortal dress," all the yea-saying satyr-poems of the "wild old wicked man" and of Crazy Jane and John Kinsella, in all the extravagances of spirit and of craft in the poems of passionate apoc-

alypse. The "rage to end all things" does not begin to contain the counteraffirmations of Yeats to tragic negation. His final emotion is not rage but joy, a complex joy which has looked into the heart of disaster and survived to praise life. So Keats wrote,

Until we are sick, we understand not;—in fine, as Byron says, "Knowledge is Sorrow"; and I go on to say that "Sorrow is Wisdom"—and further for aught we can know for certainty "Wisdom is folly"!

And so Melville wrote, almost as if by echo:

There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness. And there is a Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny spaces. And even if he for ever flies within the gorge, that gorge is in the mountains. . . .

These are the same essence as Yeats's "counteraffirmative" tragic joy, a thing larger than rage and larger than despair.

Mr. Houghton does seem to equate "a moral basis" and Christianity, "moral faith" with the sense of a "Divine Presence." Having failed to find a moral faith, he says, Yeats ended up with an "amoral faith in the heroic man." Again the equation and the conclusion seem to me less than fair. Yeats is not a Christian, he is a humanist: "Homer is my example, and his unchristened heart." He would come very close to accepting the shocking dictum of Protagoras, "Man is the measure of all things."

*Death and life were not
Till man made up the whole,
Made lock, stock and barrel
Out of his bitter soul,
Aye, sun and moon and star, all.
And further add to that
That, being dead, we rise,
Dream and so create
Translunar Paradise.*

Is humanism by definition amoral? Perhaps so; but only if so, is Yeats's faith amoral. Of his Homer with "his unchristened heart" Yeats asks, "What theme had Homer but original sin?" Morality is not the property of a single theology, though a single theology may embody it most greatly. Mr. Houghton says that Yeats falls back from a social morality to a "faith in the heroic man." What makes

that statement misleading is the definite article: Yeats's faith is in "heroic man," not "the heroic man." He is not talking about exceptional, isolated humanist heroes, the lone Prometheus, but of a heroism "general to men," racial Prometheanism. The concept may be foolish but it is not amoral. The "I" of Yeats, as of Whitman, is a "generic I." No other induction is really possible from such poems as the Crazy Jane poems Mr. Houghton uses as his instance: their hero is Everyman. Yeats himself, at least, placed his idea of heroism in very respectable company. Near the end of his life, he wrote to Ethel Mannin, "Blessed be heroic death (Shakespeare's tragedies), blessed be heroic life (Cervantes), blessed be the wise (Balzac)."

The faith of Yeats in heroic man is not the weakness of his tragic vision, but the very center of its strangeness and its strength. Yeats is a very great heretic; his spiritual arrogance is complete. His respect for man is so absolute that he leaves him alone with tragedy. Stripped of all supernatural reference, man stands naked before tragic fact; his destiny is his own to make. Every man is newly primitive man in an alien universe: the situation of generic tragedy. Yeats's tragic fable is a fable without a solution except that resident in the spirit of man. "The east has its solutions always and therefore knows nothing of tragedy. It is we, not the east, that must raise the heroic cry." If man performs well in the tragic action, he is permitted to walk on at the end in his own absurd and splendid Theophany. As a sense of man, of art, and of life, it seems to me superbly arrogant and intensely exciting. Yeatsian tragedy has the great extra richness of being a way of life as well as of art: "We begin to live when we have conceived life as tragedy." Yeats would like to take his tragic man through the course of the systematic tragic discipline, then send him back into life, instructed and chastened, but equipped with new powers of transcendence, and ready, like Malachi Stilt-Jack, to stalk on through the terrible novelty of light.

BARBARA DEMING

John Osborne's War Against the Philistines

IN THE APRIL ISSUE of *Harper's Bazaar*, Mary McCarthy hails the British playwright John Osborne for his war against the Philistines, and implies that all those who fail to applaud *Look Back in Anger* or *The Entertainer* belong stubbornly in that camp—complacent ones who would rather not be disturbed. Mr. Osborne, she says, is obsessed with waking these people up: the two plays are lively descriptions of contemporary Hell. I share her enthusiasm for Mr. Osborne's rare talents, but I think that he merits a more severe appraisal, and that she congratulates him in just the wrong terms. The two plays are lively descriptions, I think, that falter; and that falter precisely because that battle for which she salutes him distracts him from his vision.

Miss McCarthy takes up arms beside him. She attacks in particular those who are critical of *Look Back in Anger*; lumps them all with Helena, in the play itself, who feels that the hero, Jimmy Porter, should learn to behave like other people. Jimmy's jibes, she declares, "are a therapeutic method, designed to keep a few people alive, whether they like it or not." In disposing thus scornfully of all criticism either of the playwright or his hero, I think she does John Osborne injury. Implicit in his plays, and weakening them, is a like consignment to oblivion of those who will not attend to him. It is, in fact, a fatal affinity that brings this brilliant writer to Mr. Osborne's defense; for if her brilliance is sometimes marred, it is scorn that mars it; and she encourages in him the same shortcoming.

What actually are the grounds an audience has for finding Jimmy Porter provoking? Miss McCarthy would have it that he "thinks too much and criticises too freely." She likens him in this to Hamlet: "Both . . . have no fixed purpose beyond that of awakening the people around them from their trance of acceptance." But in drawing this comparison, she ascribes to both heroes too rational a behavior. She does add of Jimmy, after speaking of his therapeutic activities, "This, at any rate, is what Jimmy thinks he is doing." But the qualification is inserted lightly. She also notes that neither hero wholly wills the events he causes—that both are driven to destroy everything in sight. Strange therapy. Are these heroes, then, themselves so wide awake? If audiences are unsympathetic to Jimmy, it is because Mr. Osborne, too, would have us take the hero at his own evaluation. Is it not for the playwright to cut beneath what people *think* they are doing, to what truly moves them; to make this visible, and all its consequences—and thus to show, in Hamlet's famous words, "the very age and body of the time his form and pressure"? But Mr. Osborne's handicap here is visible in the very phrases with which Mary McCarthy praises him. The person of the author and of the hero

are interchangeable in her remarks—the anger of the one and the anger of the other, the supposed fixed purpose of the one and of the other. And Helena, who finds fault with him on stage, is interchangeable with anyone in the audience who is critical. Miss McCarthy aptly notes that Jimmy would exact complete fealty from those who enter his life. But instead of illuminating for us this impulse in his hero, Mr. Osborne would, himself, exact fealty to him—exact it of us or let us be damned. (For as Miss McCarthy notes too: “The play almost asks to be misunderstood—like an infuriated wounded person.”) This pressure on us, to take Jimmy at his word, an audience properly enough resists. *Not* to do so would be to sit in a “trance of acceptance.”

She likens Jimmy to Hamlet. Is Hamlet’s fixed purpose to awaken those around him? Surely Hamlet has no fixed purpose—though prompted to it, as he says, by Heaven and Hell. “This visitation is to whet thy almost blunted purpose,” the ghost chides him. And he chides himself, “How stand I then, /That have a father kill’d, a mother stain’d, /Excitements of my reason and my blood, /And let all sleep?” He cannot “force his soul” to a fixed purpose, because his too-fixed bent, throughout the play, is, helplessly, an irrational one. “Who this has seen. . . /Gainst Fortune’s state would treason have pronounced,” recites the First Player in a passage Hamlet specially requests. And treason of this sort is, unhappily, I think, Hamlet’s preoccupation. For to him fortune is “outrageous fortune.” From his first soliloquy, “Oh that this too too solid flesh would melt,” he is willing the impossible. He wills “not to be” in the world as given; given “a father kill’d, a mother stain’d,” times out of joint (yet not to die, since death itself may be troubled by bad dreams). One gathers from the ease with which Laertes, after *his* father’s murder, stirs up the crowd, and from all Claudius says of Hamlet’s popularity, that had his fixed purpose really been to awaken the people around him, he might have done so without great difficulty, and taken Claudius’ place upon the throne—had the truth Miss McCarthy says he would waken them to been something he himself could accept. Is the play he has the visiting players stage, for example, really a piece of therapy designed to rouse the court? Or is it not, rather, the device of one who cannot bear what he knows to be the truth, and so asks the question again: is this really the truth?—asks it, to postpone facing it? It is because he is moved not by fixed purpose but by irrational impulse that Hamlet causes events he does not will. “If Hamlet from himself be ta’en away,” as he himself says—and uses the image of shooting an arrow over the house and hurting one’s brother. All his energy is bent, helplessly, to willing fortune not to be what it is.

It is this unreasonable attempt that makes him universally sympathetic; for the impulse is one with which every man is acquainted. (In the last act of the play, when Hamlet returns from exile, he writes to Claudius: “. . . you shall know I am set naked on your kingdom”—a phrase strangely charged, for it suggests the newborn baby, and brings to mind rebellion against the very fact of being born to man’s condition.) But add, too:

Hamlet is sympathetic because we are allowed to see him clearly. The irrational impulse that torments him is illumined for us steadily—through the vision of him others have, through his own insight, through the course events take. (“How all occasions do inform against me,” he himself observes.) We see that impulse work itself out to the end, in all its destructive consequences.

What really moves Jimmy Porter in *Look Back in Anger*, if it is not the high mission that Mary McCarthy suggests? Here is a sketch of the play:

Jimmy, the young working-class intellectual who has married Alison, a colonel's daughter (against the protests of her family), for all his education, is running a sweet stall. He feels that there is no real place for him in this “American age.” He spends much of his spare time jibing at Alison's former world, which he thinks she has not sufficiently rejected. She still can't bring herself to feel the way he does about things, she admits. He declares of her mother: “That old bitch should be dead! Well? Aren't I right?” But Alison still writes to her mother. He names her former friends his natural enemies. But she lets them visit. “A monument to non-attachment,” he calls her—“Pusillanimous . . . the Lady Pusillanimous. . . . That's my wife. . . . Hi, Pusey.” “I don't think I can take much more,” Alison tells Jimmy's friend Cliff, who lives in the same building with them. She also confides to him that she is pregnant and does not dare tell Jimmy for fear he will think this a betrayal too. When Jimmy learns that Helena is coming to visit, he tells Alison, “Oh my dear wife, you've got so much to learn. . . . If only. . . something would. . . wake you out of your beauty sleep! If you could have a child, and it would die.” When Alison even begins to attend church with Helena, he tells her, “One of us is mean and stupid and crazy. Which is it?” Perhaps, one day, she'll see things his way, he tells her. “I want to be there when you grovel.” Helena urges Alison to leave Jimmy, and finally she does. (“All I want is a little peace!”) But then it all happens just as Jimmy had imagined it to himself: she has her baby; the baby dies; Alison, ill and humbled, turns up again.

In the meantime, though, Jimmy has started living with Helena, who after slapping his face one day has suddenly opened her arms to him. When Cliff, who doesn't like Helena, tells Jimmy he is moving away, Jimmy tells him he is worth a dozen Helenas to him, but he has to try to get from her what he knows she is unable to give. “Either you're with me or against me,” he begs Helena; “don't let anything go wrong.” When Alison turns up, she insists that it is not to claim Jimmy; she does not believe in the divine rights of marriage. Helena tells her that she is talking like Jimmy now; hadn't she said that she could not believe in him? Well she, Helena, realizes that she must leave him; she can't be happy hurting someone else. Jimmy tells her that she hasn't the guts for loving, then. Exit Helena. Jimmy cries: “Was I wrong to believe that there's a kind of burning virility of mind and spirit that looks for something as powerful as itself? . . . I may be a lost cause, but I thought if you loved me, it needn't matter.” Alison cries: “It doesn't matter! I

was wrong, I was wrong! I don't want to be neutral. . . . I want to be a lost cause. I want to be corrupt and futile! . . . I'm grovelling!" He takes her in his arms.

Here, surely, is a man in no condition to minister to those around him—a lost person, without a world of his own, as he says; suffering in a void, and impelled—as Miss McCarthy herself notes (without realizing that she undermines her own characterisation of him)—to “equalize the suffering”; impelled to find for himself company in that void (especially the company of one from that dying world he feels has hurt him). In another recent play, Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, a character employs the image “Like the solitary child who turns himself into children, 2, 3, so as to be together. . . in the dark.” The image applies to Jimmy.

Yes, it is a lively vision of Hell, as Miss McCarthy says. But it is a confusing vision, too. Because Mr. Osborne is unwilling to allow that Hell deforms his hero. Ophelia speaks of Hamlet's “sovereign reason /Like sweet bells jangled out of tune.” Hamlet says of himself, “My wit's diseased.” But Mr. Osborne is leery of admitting any testimony that Jimmy Porter's actions are not healthy and wise. And for this reason many in an audience who would otherwise find him sympathetic enough, look at him askance. Instead of affording us the chronicle of an irrational passion, the play takes virtually the form of a case stubbornly argued for its hero. Question for the jury: “One of us is mean and stupid and crazy. Which is it?” One after another, all the other characters are brought to testify in Jimmy's behalf. Helena for a while bears witness against him, but, characterized as she is, Jimmy can declare, when she contradicts him, “That makes my point”; and her subsequent declaration of love undermines all her professed objections to him. Alison asks Cliff: “Do you think he's right. . . about. . . oh everything?” Cliff does. Even Alison's father decides that Jimmy has a lot of right on his side; he even admits, when Alison tells him what Jimmy thinks of *him*, “Perhaps Jimmy's right.” “Right”—the word recurs like a musical leitmotif, announcing, always, Jimmy. As for Jimmy's view of himself: Miss McCarthy writes that both he and Hamlet suffer from self-doubt—“though this is clearer in Hamlet's case.” It is clearer indeed. He does once almost apologize to Alison—explaining that he hits out at her because he wants her so much. He does almost apologize to Cliff, for letting him go away—explaining that he has to try to get something from Helena that he knows she cannot give. But at the end of the play, he names the quest that torments him and others the natural quest of a burning virility of mind and spirit. After all the testimony to his rightness, we have little reason to suppose we are not to take his word for it. The very order of events unfolds in the pattern of a daydream the hero himself has dreamed, in answer to that question he himself has raised. The curtain goes down on the dreamed-of verdict: He is right; Alison is wrong. (It is as though in *Hamlet* the scene with his mother ended the moment she said, “O Hamlet. . . Thou turnst my very eyes into my soul, /And there I see such black and grained spots. . . .” Curtain, before the ghost can enter and

chide Hamlet. It is as though the whole play ended with a variation of Ophelia's mad scene, in which she appears, in distraction, before him, and tells him: If you are mad, I want to be mad, too. Instead of advising her, "Get thee to a nunnery," he has told her he hopes her father is murdered too, and it makes a human being of her.)

The vision that *Look Back in Anger* affords is partial in the word's full sense. Put through their paces as witnesses for Jimmy, the characters have often little reality beyond that. What really moves Helena at various crucial moments, for example, is anybody's guess. Mr. Osborne never reveals much more to us about any of the characters than Jimmy himself bothers to remark about them. The play is, in effect, written in the first person. Cliff seems to us very real, because he seems so to Jimmy. Jimmy himself is always wonderfully vivid to us—yet unknown, too, as a first-person hero is who avoids self-examination. At the play's end, he has what he has been asking for. Now that he has it, is he gratified? Or appalled? If the curtain were to go up again on some subsequent Sunday afternoon, what should we see? I am curious as to what Miss McCarthy would say.

In *The Entertainer*, she says, the enemy is identified with the "men of Suez" and "this, being a political grievance, is easier for an audience to sympathise with. To be angry about politics is conventional." Thus again she tags all possible criticism of him as Philistine. But I think the real reason why audiences find this play less provoking is that it does not have the aggressively first-person quality of *Look Back in Anger*. In *The Entertainer*, three generations in the family of Archie Rice, music hall comedian, are shown in lively and subtle relation to each other; and none seems simply the projection of one character's imagination. This is a very much richer play than *Look Back in Anger*. It is, I think, an extraordinary play. And yet in *The Entertainer*, too, Mr. Osborne fails to let the drama he has set in motion take its full course. And again it is because he is obsessed with pointing out to us who are the right people (or as Archie calls them, the "real people"). Again he is distracted by his compulsion (which Miss McCarthy lauds) to tell off the Philistines. He so obscures the play with which he really starts that Mary McCarthy, in describing *The Entertainer*, can discount its family scenes. For her, everything happens in those scenes in which Archie Rice is seen on the job, "gamely doing his act." The link with Suez, she says, is strained in the home scenes (where word that Archie's son is fighting in Egypt seems a little arbitrary), but here it becomes real: an audience instinctively catches the equation between an actor keeping the show going and a soldier holding the fort. She speaks particularly of one moment in which Archie is revealed before a tall nude wearing the helmet of Britannia—"like a recruiting poster." "His fading personal fortunes are eerily identified with the fading of the Empire." She likens the play to Shaw's *Heart-break House*. Political caricature is brilliantly achieved here; but it constitutes, after all, little more than a moment's comment. There is a very much more substantial life to the play than this—in the tradition of Chekhov rather than Shaw.

There are curious parallels between *The Entertainer* and Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* (from which I have already quoted). View the two side by side, and the real drama in *The Entertainer* becomes more visible; the irrelevant elements Osborne has allowed to obscure it stand out in sharp relief—above all, his battling insistence that his heroes have problems which the rest of humanity is not likely to appreciate. Mr. Osborne has Archie Rice declare of his family, "We're deadbeat and downandouts . . . why, we have problems that nobody ever hears of . . . we're so remote from the rest of ordinary everyday human experience." The scene on which the curtain rises in *Endgame* is at first glance remote indeed from the everyday. In a bare basement room God knows where, with two tiny windows high up, and out those windows "zero zero zero—nothing stirring," live: old Nell and Nagg, side by side in two ashcans; their son Hamm, crippled and blind, stuck in a big throne chair; and Clov, Hamm's adopted son, who still gets about enough to wait on the others, but whose legs and eyes already bother him—deadbeat characters certainly. The effort of *Endgame*, however, is clearly enough to sharpen in us the sense of a *familiar* plight. (Beckett's plays are usually spoken of as highly intellectualized constructions; but actually they set a kind of life in motion before us that is, if not natural, then a comic fantastic imitation of the natural—of the all-too-everyday.)

Both plays feature three generations—their respective attitudes toward life strikingly parallel. "It's all over, finished," Archie's old father, Billie, laments. "You haven't lived, most of you . . . don't know what life can be like." "Ah yesterday!" cries Hamm's old mother. This generation likes to recall at length the way things used to be, and is requested at intervals to be quiet. "Bottle him!" Hamm will yell (and Clov puts the covers on the garbage cans). "Oh go to bed!" his family tells Billie, more affectionately. The next generation speaks words that are almost identical. Archie: "I'm dead behind these eyes . . . don't feel a thing . . . Nothing really touches me . . . You don't think I'm real, do you? Well, I'm not." And Hamm: "I was never there. Absent always. It all happened without me. I don't know what's happened." Their children level against this generation a harsh accusation—that they are criminally careless of the lives of others. ("All those I might have helped," Hamm mumblingly admits. Archie admits nothing—when Jean tells him he will be the death of his wife and of his father, he merely retorts, "Go on, insult me.") The third generation hungers for escape. Clov complains that there is nothing to do here but watch his light fading. And Archie's son Frank complains to his sister, "Don't kid yourself anyone's going to let you do anything or try anything here, Jeannie . . . Who are you—you're nobody. You're nobody."

The Hell described is essentially the same in the two plays (that Hell lightened in *The Entertainer* by considerably more mutual affection, but in *Endgame* by the much greater insight of its characters). It is so much the same that one could actually transpose many speeches from one play to the other, without disrupting effect. At random: from which play is the

following taken: "yesterday...that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day"? The real life of each play is essentially the same—as one watches them all try to get through those bloody awful days somehow. In *Endgame*, Hamm calls regularly for his "painkiller." In *The Entertainer*, much gin is consumed. Mutual torture provides relief of a sort. ("I haven't made you suffer too much?" Hamm demands of Clov—"shocked," the playwright specifies. For Hamm is more aware of what he is doing than Jimmy in *Look Back in Anger*.) And in both plays, too, all believe in putting up a show. Archie: "If you learn it properly, you'll get yourself a technique.... You see this face.... It can sing, and tell the worst, unfunniest stories in the world.... I have a go... I do. I have a go." Hamm: "I've got on with my story.... I've got on with it a little, all the same. Technique, you know." In both plays it is forever "party time" or "story time." "Sing one of your songs, that's a good boy," or "go on, love, have a go," they encourage each other in *The Entertainer*. Some of the truly wonderful moments in that play are those in which the family rouses itself out of sodden gloom with some bit of vaudeville, and they all, in turn, "have a go." In *Endgame* the picture is more stark. Family spirit is lacking. Clov is not a willing audience for Hamm, nor is his father, whom he sometimes bribes with a sugarplum to listen. For all of them, "it's slow work." ("What time is it?" "The same as usual.") In both plays, there is a wonderful sense of this, as they all try to fight off the conviction that they are nobody, nobody—to fight off the terror of this, and the boredom. Here is the real drama presented us (a drama, note, akin to the real drama which Mr. Osborne blurs in *Look Back in Anger*). They are alone in the universe, Jean complains; there's no more God, and they have only themselves. The same complaint is made in *Endgame*: "The bastard! He doesn't exist!" "Not yet!" And the life of the play is their desperate attempt to believe that *they* exist. "Why this farce day after day?" Clov asks Hamm. "One never knows," Hamm replies; could they possibly be beginning to mean something? Archie tells Jean that he once saw hope and strength in the face of an old Negro woman, who was singing her heart out to the world. Anyone who could stand up and make a pure, just natural noise like that, there's nothing wrong with them. But, he adds, he will never be able to make that kind of "beautiful fuss" himself. Behind all the show he puts up, lies the terror that it is quite meaningless.

When Mary McCarthy describes Archie up before the curtain, doing his act, she describes him as listening, intent, for the patter of applause which will assure him that he is still there in the spotlight—that he still exists. She says, very aptly, "All the clichés of the stage... take on in this play a quality of sheer horror." Yes, but the family scenes, too, belong in this vision. *The Entertainer* is not just a play in which the figure of the old pro struggling through his act affords us a political caricature of the fading British Empire. In less abstract fashion, the stage clichés of which she speaks illumine the everyday life of a particular family. Here lies Osborne's real art.

This illumination, however, is fitful. There is a great deal of plot to *The Entertainer* which I have hardly hinted at and of which Miss McCarthy complains that it is "clumsily messengered in," by telegrams, newspaper stories and so on, so that it carries little conviction. The trouble is not that it is messengered in—which is the way, after all, in which, with convincing enough effect, much of the plot is unfolded in a Greek tragedy. The trouble is that most of it is irrelevant—is merely battle with the Philistines. In waging this battle, *The Entertainer* follows the pattern of *Look Back in Anger*. The play starts as Archie's daughter arrives for a visit (for she has been living apart from the family). They promptly raise the question of whether she feels allegiance to them any longer. They assume that she probably does not, would rather be back in London with her nice proper young fiancé. "Aren't you glad you're normal?" her father taunts her. At the start of the play she asks naïvely, "My own people—who are my people?" But by the end of the play—like Alison—she has come to know who they are. In the next but last scene of the play, her fiancé tries to patch up a quarrel they have had, and asks her to marry him right away. He tells her proudly that he has quite a decent career lined up. He could not have said anything more fatal. She turns him down flat, to stay with the family. Her people, she realizes at last, are the downandouts. (In a matching scene, Archie rejects the help offered him by his successful lawyer brother, who will pay all Archie's debts and keep him out of jail—to which he is in danger of being sent—if Archie will accept a certain job in Canada. Archie tells him he prefers jail—where he is sure to meet people he knows. Departing, he carefully insults his brother.)

Even this extraneous drama is a drama of blurred outline. Halfway through the play, Jean makes shocked accusations against Archie. By the time she takes her stand with her own kind, how has her outrage been resolved? What does she think of her father? One does not know. It is easy to forget to ask, because another plot element has been introduced that distracts one from such questions. If the two scenes of telling-off the Philistines supposedly resolve this play, this other plot-line provides most of the big curtain effects throughout. At the end of Act One, Archie, fighting tears, tells Jean he has just had word that his youngest son has been taken prisoner in Egypt. At the end of Act Two, word comes that the boy has been killed; Archie staggers to his feet, howling a blues song, and bursts into drunken sobs. In spite of the magnificent acting of Laurence Olivier, these moments which are given particular dramatic stress are oddly unaffecting. Or rather, that they are is not odd, for what Archie really suffers, he has complained, is the fact that nothing any longer touches him. A climax of *feeling* is a false climax in this play. It is false in a double sense. The news of the death is introduced just after Jean has made her first accusations against Archie. Again, the pattern recalls *Look Back in Anger*. That play contains a weird moment in which, in reply to sharp criticism from Helena, Jimmy abruptly informs her that as a boy of ten he had to watch his father die. That, we are apparently sup-

posed to feel, puts *her* in her place. Later, in reply to another attack upon him, he is able to inform her that he has just returned from watching at another death-bed. (Shortly after this, Helena opens her arms to him.) The introduction of a death which grieves the hero serves in both plays to relieve the playwright of the necessity of bringing him face to face with himself.

Yet of *The Entertainer* especially it can be said that it is toward some moment in which the hero must confront himself that the whole play properly tends. Underlying all Archie's fussing, and all Hamm's, is the nervous dread of being left, finally, to himself—no murmur from a responsive audience rising any longer to give him reassurance. *Endgame* does move doggedly toward that moment. Hamm's parents die, Clov finally manages to leave him, and Hamm is alone. "Discard"—he throws away various comforting objects—among them the whistle with which he used to summon Clov—and, stoically, faces the silence. *The Entertainer* almost ends in a comparable scene. We see Archie for the last time up in front of the curtain, going through one of his numbers. He falters; his wife appears out of the shadows, holding his hat and coat, and we see that the drop curtain has vanished, the darkened stage is behind him; they walk off together. The moment is filled with a kind of terror; but the nature of the terror eludes one. What is Archie's sense of himself finally? How much, for example, have Jean's accusations bothered him? We cannot tell. All we really know is that he prefers himself, Archie Rice, to his brother. He has made that very clear. And it is clear enough that we are supposed to, too. (After describing the brother, in the playscript, Mr. Osborne taunts: "If you can't recognise him, it's for one reason only.") Archie does not remain, here at the end, to confront the silence. Instead, he returns for a moment to tease the audience: "Let me know where you're working tomorrow night, and I'll come and see *you*!"

No, it is a disservice to John Osborne, I believe, to congratulate him upon his war with the Philistines. Behind the smoke of this, he is actually taking cover. Instead of submitting his heroes to a final clear scrutiny, he turns to taunt: Oh, aren't all of you out there glad you're normal? Mr. Beckett puts in Clov's mouth the observation, "Nobody ever thought so crooked as we"; but neither Jimmy Porter nor Archie Rice makes any such admission; and Mr. Osborne seems unable, even to himself, to make it about them. He would paint a modern Hell. But he would if he could, damn only those who supposedly "don't know what it's like" for his heroes. If he could find the courage to examine the human heart without distraction—putting aside an anger that is really a complacent snobbery of his own—then his plays might indeed awaken us.

"The man," says Albert Camus, "who, as often happens, chose the path of art because he was aware of his difference, soon learns that he can nourish his art, and his difference, solely by admitting his resemblance to all." These are words for John Osborne to ponder.

JOSEPH KERMAN

American Music: The Columbia Series

FIVE OR SIX YEARS AGO, according to the official account, an American composer came upon an executive of Columbia Records in a deep, dark forest:

. . . the composer alleged that the gramophone companies were neglecting their duty. "American music gets published and performed all over the world nowadays, but the recording companies pretend it doesn't exist. And every year the backlog of unrecorded American music gets vaster." That is what the composer said to the business man.

The business man replied to the composer, "I'll change all that if you will show me how to do it."

—a reply which we may vastly doubt was ever replied. But in any case, Virgil Thomson, Aaron Copland, Henry Cowell, and William Schuman were appointed together with the executive as a committee to pick out enough compositions for six LP records a year. Selections are limited to chamber music and in principle to works previously unrecorded; it also seems that only composers of some reputation are considered, and that each man gets one record-side, no more. (Two sides if the chosen piece is uncommonly long, like Ives's *First Sonata* and the *Carter Quartet*; two sides—no more—if the composer is a member of the committee.) As a consequence of these rules announced and tacit, Columbia's *Modern American Music Series* now appears to be running down quietly after 44 record-sides and 38 composers.

Included is an unconscionable amount of experimental material of slight interest to anybody except Thomson and Cowell—material from the 20's, or in the spirit of the 20's, which has never come to anything. Otherwise the music stems mainly from the better academics and from the Boston-Boulanger-Stravinsky group. At first glance the long-standing complaint of discrimination against chromatic-wing composers does seem to be substantiated by the series. Only the last waning years saw the addition of such important figures as Carter and Sessions.

But I would not quarrel much with the committee, which I believe has done a better job of selection than is usual in such circumstances. Columbia's motives, after all, were less critical than representative, patriotic, philanthropic, and prestigious. Silly or not, experimentation has been a prominent feature in contemporary composition; the academics do represent our most solidly entrenched group of composers; the twelve-tone people are few, and I think of only one, Ben Weber, who might be said to be conspicuously absent. While the committee has sometimes elected the

wrong work of a young composer,¹ they have also managed to include the very best of older men like Copland and Sessions. The task, in other words, was to tidy up the forest: the usual rough, benevolent work of the woodsman. You can pace around now in the clear at will, and pick out strong trees and dead ones, limp saplings and likely shoots.

The longest piece in the series is also the most advanced and the most difficult: Elliott Carter's String Quartet, written in 1951.² Carter is an interesting case of slow artistic development, or rather, late eruption. Almost until his 40's, evidently, he wrote in a sober academic style under the general influence of Nadia Boulanger. Around 1945 he became absorbed in some radical ideas which have transformed his work; indirectly they have also led him to use twelve-tone techniques in his latest music. Carter is one of the few impressive composers to appear (or emerge) since the war, and his innovations have received a good deal of critical attention, as such things go.

The Quartet, then, is distinctly novel, a rare enough quality in a responsible piece of music nowadays. Rarer still, the novelties come already to a certain provisional integrity. Even at the most innocent first hearing, I should think, the great complexity cannot mask a sure impression that some very tough and determined screaming is going on, and that something extraordinary is being done with time. In other words—what is rarest of all—the composer is tangling directly with the roots of music.

Yet Carter is without doubt an unnaturally cold composer, even at a time in which we have become habituated to the dry, the granitic, and the knotty in musical composition. His characteristic processes are squarely "cerebral," even though in the Quartet they are not "determined" in any pre-ordained way. Carter experiments in an area that has been neglected as a serious musical resource: not melody, harmony, rhythm properly speaking, form, or organization, but speed—more exactly, comparative speeds: he works with different speeds simultaneously and successively. He probably considers superposition and juxtaposition of speeds as two temporal modes of the same combination, in the way that composers regard the two aspects of the interval between pitches: the simultaneous or harmonic, and the successive or melodic. In either dimension, one wants to develop an integral sense of relationship and contrast.

In the simultaneous mode, Carter's procedure can be seen in its most extreme form at certain passages of grand climax. Here the four instru-

¹ Andrew Imbrie, for example, is on the list with his First Quartet of 1942, which was an extraordinary accomplishment for a college undergraduate, but scarcely does justice to his present work.

² Columbia ML 5104: The Walden Quartet of the University of Illinois (Homer Schmitt and Bernard Goodman, violins; John Garvey, viola; Robert Swenson, cello), \$4.98. Miniature score published by Associated Music Publishers. The piece looks to be so difficult that one can only gasp admiration at the Walden Quartet for playing it with such authoritative *brío*. I must say, however, that the cross-rhythms are inaccurately managed at a number of exposed points, such as the very first *pizzicato* entrance of the second violin. This is a fairly simple rhythmic situation; I wonder about the more complex ones which my ear certainly does not discriminate safely.

ments play almost exclusively in even notes but at four distinct rates, and continue so for half a minute; and here Carter feels free to set the durations of the basic units of the voices in a ratio that would gain the respect of an African drummer. At a passage ending the first movement of the Quartet the cello beats even quarter-notes, the basic unit of the viola is a dotted half-note tied to a dotted eighth-note, the second violin moves so that three of its notes fit to four of the cello's quarter-notes, and the first violin is subdividing the cello's bar of three quarter-notes into fives. The ratio of these speeds is expressed most simply (!) as 60:225:80:36. If the players were provided with synchronized metronomes, which might not be a bad idea, these would have to be set for the moment at MM 180, 48, 125, and 300.

At such places Carter is working with pure pulse. In contrast to Stravinsky, for instance, who also wants the parts in his polyphony to stand out very independently, Carter does not define or differentiate the parts by means of melody, harmony, rhythm or color. As far as melody goes, Carter's lines are utterly bland and as alike as shoe-laces: they consist almost entirely of even notes lined up in seconds, thirds, and scale passages, with enough chromatic notes to destroy a sense of simple diatonicism. The harmonic idiom is a complete morass. The fact that Carter writes a quartet indicates that color plays no integral role in his contrapuntal scheme, though *pizzicato* is used to good effect. In its purest form, his texture depends only on the intricately staggered simultaneous speeds.

Simultaneous speeds give Carter novel possibilities of texture; successive speeds give him novel possibilities of musical movement. "Metrical modulation" is a term that has been applied (not very accurately) to his technique of changing tempo during a piece so that the new rate bears a precise and complex relationship to the original one. To modulate from a passage built on speeds A, B, and C, in which A dominates, a subsidiary speed B simply continues in one voice while the others shift (one at a time, probably) to new speeds. What would appear to be the chief lyric idea in the first movement is introduced in this way. The prior section is determined metrically by even movement in quarter-notes, above which a slow theme (in even notes) is unfolding five times as slowly. While the quarters continue undisturbed, the new theme enters abruptly in notes $1\frac{1}{3}$ times as slow as the quarters—that is to say, three of the new units occupy the time of four of the old units. The initial effect is of an arresting cross-rhythm; but the quarters soon die out, leaving the new unit as the dominant speed of the piece. Whereupon new speeds are added to it contrapuntally, and so on. The speed has been slowed by the ratio 4:3, from MM 180 to 135. Triplet eighth-notes which had been running along previously continue at exactly the same rate, but now group themselves in fours.

In this Quartet, for the first time in Carter's work, the various possibilities of texture built on simultaneous speeds are amply explored. (The thematic material is rarely *quite* so neutral, and the speeds rarely so elaborately displaced, as in the passage at the end of the first movement.) Some textures are perfectly fascinating; others are dull, as counterpoint always tends to become when the subject matter is uninteresting and geared to no

clear harmonic goal. But in either case, Carter succeeds rather surprisingly in skirting rhythmic chaos, even the benign chaos of a gamelan, as it sounds to Western ears. Though often one apprehends only vaguely what is going on, even an extreme passage such as the end of the first movement seems to travel, in an energetic, highly disciplined vector. The contrast between one texture and the next is often very imaginative in itself, and as for the “metrical modulations,” their vitality goes some way to justify the parent textures. Speeds change all the time; Carter uses as many “metrical modulations” as Wagner uses harmonic ones. They create a sense of freedom that is exhilarating and not in the least arbitrary. Paradoxical as it may appear, the constantly-changing, constantly-related flux of tempo provides a solid matrix for a rapid procession of ideas. The piece breathes with jagged and expansive purpose.

It is the ideas themselves that give one pause. They are not harsh, which would at least be a positive quality, but nonchalantly crimped and gauche —“unmusical” (a mystique word, but indispensable). What is more to the point, the material all sounds the same and so tends to neutralize the piece. One speculates that this may be a deliberate tactic to set off Carter’s rhythmic effects, but the total form of the Quartet does not support such an interpretation. For in spite of its innovations, the Quartet relies to a considerable extent on conventional formal devices posited on clarity and definition. The themes, for instance, are apparently intended to count; Carter does not exactly develop them, but he does repeat them, and the result is often trivial, or absent—because the themes are so drab, and get lost in the counterpoints. What I have referred to as the main lyric theme of the first movement (but I am not even sure that Carter means it as such) leaves the listener unmoved at its various emphatic recurrences. Climax is achieved by the use of snappy rhythmic figures: a traditional resource which contrasts crudely with the sophistication of the texture. Lacking is any convincing sense of harmonic direction or even of momentary progression.

True, this unusually lengthy work holds together tolerably well; only the last movement seems to me definitely too long. But unless I mistake him, Carter is not really content just to hold a work together. Since Beethoven, composers have been dogged or inspired by the idea that musical form should be significant, not merely adequate. Like all traditional ideals adopted uncircumspectly, this one is dangerous because it does not suit everybody’s temperament or technique. The Romantic composers, by and large, tried to work in Beethoven’s spirit and failed; the trouble is not that their form is insignificant or merely sufficient, but that it becomes pretentious: form is a little worse than adequate when it attempts and misses profundity. When Carter makes a solemn unaccompanied *da capo* of the opening of his first movement as a final variation in his last movement, the result is no more than a paradox. One thinks idly of the finale in Brahms’ Clarinet Quintet—a variation movement that is sufficiently different, heaven knows, but likewise is capped with a *da capo* of the first-movement theme. At the end of his life Brahms had learned not to aim for much, but

understated elegy, he had learned, was excellently within his technical reach.

Formal uncertainty in the Quartet comes from uneasy grafting of new on to old. This is work in progress; either the graft needs to be more aptly made, or fresh principles will have to be further developed and frankly applied. In this area, Carter seems to be working with a rare sense of responsibility, caution, and respect for musical realities. But a start has been made, and he may be developing a purely dynamic ideal of form, in which the element of change will overshadow every other element except texture. In any case, a number of interesting formal ideas have stemmed directly from his preoccupation with speed. An intriguing notion is the systematic acceleration of a theme. The last movement of the Quartet begins with a cello figure which for once and for this purpose takes real shape: B-D-B-D-B-D-B-C-E in even notes. At first this is sounded very slowly, like a deliberate *cantus firmus* which scaffolds the piece for a while.³ But it grows slightly faster at each recurrence—always, of course, by an increment precisely determined by “metrical modulation”—until it has the aspect of a brief motive; presently it speeds up to a *tremolo*, exactly 21 times as fast as at its first appearance, and then it goes up in smoke, leaving the conclusion of the piece to other thematic material introduced during its dying days. This by the way exemplifies another habit of Carter’s: to work in his themes unobtrusively, use them centrally for a time, and later drop them, while others gain prominence after having entered quietly in their turn. The title of the last movement, “Variations,” refers to free variations on several such themes successively, or so I take it. These formal ideas are less realized than interesting—or promising, as we say when interest for one reason or another extends to sympathy.

All the above observations apply to the first and last movements of the Quartet, the framing movements. The second movement, *allegro scorrevole*, uses “metrical modulations” only in its trio.⁴ The third, a huge *adagio* which ballasts the Quartet and undoubtedly provides its most arresting moments, does something quite different. Carter has developed a kind of fierce rhapsody or recitative, reminiscent of such things in Bartók, as for example in the Fourth Quartet, but much more violent, complicated, immediate, and naked. He writes this for cello, or viola, or for viola and cello; they tear along an unpredictable course, pulling up for abrupt rests and *gruppetti*, slashing at quadruple stops, jumping strings, and generally retching out their soundboxes. Melodically, the style as compared with Carter’s usual pokey writing has something of the power and the precise, cold whimsey of one of those endless falls in Yellowstone or Yosemite. Harmonically, these recitatives imply next to nothing, but harmonic blankness has a certain negative virtue here, in stripping the music down

³ The theme reminds one idly of the celebrated *cantus firmus* of Josquin’s Mass *Hercules Dux Ferrarie*; and of course many aspects of Carter’s style are reminiscent of musical techniques from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

⁴ Carter has a peculiar system of breaking his piece during movements, rather than in between them. This makes little sense to me.

to a level of primitive response below the elegance of musical theory. Rhythmically, the lines are very intricately controlled—the characteristic touch—as though to simulate a *rubato*, and yet nail down every inflection so that no arbitrary mollification will be possible. These recitatives do not yearn or declaim, they rasp with terrible authority. Carter builds a sepulchre for them as bare and unexceptionable as the great pyramids: an initial explosion for the low instruments is followed by a slow white duet high in the violins; then recitative; then duet; then the duet continues with the recitative gradually breaking in at the same time, rhythmically out of phase. The duet has no personality, acting simply as a foil.

Recitative for cello, somewhat calmer, opens the first movement too, but soon dissolves into the rhythmicized style discussed above. Half way through the movement the recitative appears again, quite exactly; and this time, in spite of its ostensible written-in *rubato*, it is perfectly fitted with counterpoints weaving in and out by means of “metrical modulations.” As a purely formal effect, this is more successful than most in the Quartet, and certainly happier than the return of this recitative at the very end of the finale.

Force, vitality, novelty, extreme complexity—everything but passion and grace. The experimental features in the Quartet all seem to make musical, not merely speculative, sense; they seem more interesting—more promising—than the ideas that are occupying the international *avant garde*. But by anybody’s standards, this is a remarkably dry composer. All of the best modern composers sing somehow: they are paralyzed lyricists, solemn lyricists, shy, sly, gauche, slick, come-lately lyricists, one or the other or several; but Carter is like Krenek—no lyricist. The very power of his recitatives comes from their being all hard utterance and no song. His play of speeds engenders the same kind of vivid fascination as the lively, metallic flight of a humming-bird. Remarkable, then, how this cold exhausting piece pierces down so far into musical roots.

Roger Sessions is another composer who never writes a graceful phrase. But to turn from Carter to Sessions—to the opening *lento* fugue of the Second Quartet, first of all—is to be struck by the intense expressivity of every musical conjunction.⁵ One thinks immediately, in fact, of the Beethoven C# minor Quartet, an association reinforced by not a few details later on. Yet in his material, Sessions is as strained, unwieldy, thick, and

⁵ Columbia ML 5105: New Music Quartet (Broadus Erle and Matthew Raimondi, violins; Walter Trampler, viola; David Soyer, cello), with Colin McPhee’s Concerto for Piano with Wind Octette Accompaniment (Grant Johannesen, piano, with Carlos Surinach conducting Wind Octet), \$4.98. Score published by Edward B. Marks Music Corporation. Technically the performance is most impressive; stylistically it is over-inflected. The players tend to treat every expressive interval with the same rich passion, and every vigorous gesture with the same solemn excitement. This neutralizes the piece, and makes one wonder how well the players really grasp it: they hear each detail beautifully, but do they hear the whole? The fact is, music of this type is almost always supercharged in performance. While it existed, the New Music Quartet was probably the best of American quartets, and their work here as always is a pleasure: precise, suave, powerful.

"unmusical" as Carter. The difference is that Carter is perfectly glad to leave it at that, whereas Sessions is determined to transmute the notes into passion: the ugliness *shall* yield sense and direction. It is as though these men could only walk with the greatest pain. Carter is working to contrive a more comfortable means of modern travel; Sessions insists on walking, and walking, and walking.

He covers ground, or sometimes he stumbles: an edifying spectacle for those who do not have too delicate artistic sensibilities, but even for us not a very pleasurable one. What carries Sessions along this death-march is an amazing power of expressivity on the largest level—the level, precisely, of significant form. He can derive the maximum meaning from a recapitulation, a variation, a transition, a passage of development, a reference back three or thirteen minutes. Fulfilment, progress, and coherence are senses that he can manipulate perfectly. Sessions' music has a gloomy history of repelling audiences and selection committees alike, partly because of its unattractive surface, and partly because it has not always been realized in its own terms. But the true difficulty presented by this music is simply the difficulty of measuring any serious vision, not the difficulty of reorientation to genuine novelty of expression. Sessions travels a known road.

The term "traditional" has to be handled gingerly if it is to serve for more than the latest noisy rejections. As ordinarily employed, this term categorizes the academic composers so well established on our musical scene, and so well represented on Columbia's Modern American Music Series. Categorizations are naturally made on the most superficial level, that of style: the academics compose in a traditional style, a vaguely modernized compote of Brahms, Sibelius, Strauss, Ravel, whatever. This may be decorated with some neoclassical topping, but is never spiked with real chromaticism, even of Wagnerian vintage.

Sessions' writing, on the other hand, is firmly chromatic. He takes voice leading very seriously: every semitone bleeds into its resolution, and every dissonance is seen through relentlessly to its resolution. Widely-ranging compound intervals are milked to yield much intensity (a style-characteristic that is never very satisfactory to my ear). Sonorities are based not principally on tritones or sixths and thirds, but on major seconds and on particularly cross-grained minor seconds and ninths: thus Sessions likes to lead contrapuntally from a major seventh to a minor ninth, exchanging pitches: F-e to E-f. The resulting charcoal toughness is as far in spirit from the elegance of a Schoenberg as from the innocent cacophony of a Carter. Sessions' style, stemming from the famous "crisis of romantic harmony in *Tristan*," has a perfectly good right to be called traditional too, at least by the customary license of historicism. But the actual issue is not of style. Between academic conservatism and Sessions' traditionalism lies the distinction between "style and idea," in Schoenberg's phrase: with Sessions the objectives are traditional; while the means are in some sense radical and certainly extreme, the ends are Beethovenian. And in this fundamental respect, Sessions is less radical than older men like Schoenberg, or younger men like Elliott Carter and many another.

Presumably most academic composers, as opposed to experimentalists, seek or piously hope to realize the same ideal of significant form that is Sessions' study. After all, that is what we are taught that form is all about. But while talk about objectives is necessary in criticism, one never reaches more than a provisional confidence as to a composer's intention without some intuition of accomplishment, over and above aspiration. Musical meaning is not to be gauged intellectually; something essential is lacking until one grasps what is meant by some act of sympathy, until one can feel that the intention is realized. With the academics, nothing is realized, and so one is bound to judge that their objectives, like their styles, are unclear. Neither form nor style seem to be *considered*, but merely applied. When it is hard to establish any clear impression of authenticity of style or form, it is practically hopeless to conceive any valid connection between one and the other.

Sessions' objectives are forthright in the music—and that, I suppose, is simply to say that they are achieved. Take the central movement of the Quartet: a theme (*andante tranquillo*) with five variations, all of about the same length, mood, and tempo, all rather clearly separated, and none of them too remote from the original material. This seems very standard, very patent, yet it covers a highly original conception. The theme itself is simple, as a matter of fact rather Haydnish in construction: an 8-bar phrase (opening with an expressive motive and extended by an extra 2-bar cadential echo) followed by two interlocked 6-bar phrases. The first variation meditates closely but with wonderful flexibility on the theme, and shows how its ending might be regarded as a version of its beginning. In the second variation the theme is distilled—into even notes, down to *pianissimo*, towards exquisitely painful sprung intervals, up to the very top of the violin range. The ending now grows indistinct. The third variation, which is slower, builds to the severe climax that is a hallmark of Sessions' slow movements; the tail of the theme now positively trails away, in anticipation of the conclusion of the entire movement (and also the conclusion of the entire Quartet). The fourth variation, dwelling as it does on the pregnant opening motive, sounds more like a transition than a complete episode. The final variation sounds more like a coda. Here the first 8 plus 2 bars of the theme return fairly exactly, though with strong spontaneous changes of detail. They lead not to any treatment of the rest of the theme, but into a passage of thematic extinction of a kind that Sessions has made peculiarly his own. An oscillating figure winds slowly down in the cello; viola and violin rack parallel sevenths and ninths; the other violin erupts with a new deliberate figure—low, and clangorous, Copland would say—which connects immediately and passionately in the mind with the original motive, its intervals drawn out almost beyond recognition.

The intention is less to expand, reinterpret, or dress the theme than to probe it in its own terms, as it were. Sessions is also very concerned to limit the serial quality inherent in a string of variations. A single dynamic is asserted over the fivefold repetition. Subtle prevarication with the final bars of the theme in the variations (indeed in the theme itself) contributes to this end by leading from one variation to the next integrally, and ul-

timately guiding in the next movement. As the piece progresses, the opening motive quietly gains more force than the total structure of the theme, up to the terse, dramatic revelation at the end.

The whole thing is compelling; and while one always hopes to support intuitive judgements of form by analysis, one becomes wary about placing much trust in this particular critical technique. For musical analysis is becoming omnivorous; it detects more and more Alexandrian, irrelevant relationships, since of course analysis has no criterion of value. A very striking passage always resists "explanation": the extraordinary transition, say, between the middle section and the final section of the opening *lento* double fugue. The middle section (using a pair of faster new themes plus diminutions of the original fugue subject) has come to a violent dense climax, after which harmony, counterpoint, rhythm, and color all combine to cut the texture with a *coup de théâtre*. Only an ascending second, mainly a minor second, harps for several slow bars. This prepares the return of the original *lento* subject, which begins with two ascending major seconds. The draughtsmanship makes excellent sense, but sense does not explain the weight of summation achieved by the subdominant-sounding return of the subject; by the reappearance, two octaves up, of the original counter-subject, which we had never imagined would come to this; and by beautifully imaginative new details—delicate sevenths rocking in the viola, and two wispy cello harmonics supporting the theme, reaching back to pitches that had been central in the transition itself. Hopefully, analysis may point to the sufficient, but never to the necessary conditions for formal significance, coherence, and conviction. And only flimsily can metaphor suggest what it is that is signified, what convinces, and what seems so importantly to cohere.

A good piece brings up squarely the various brooding impossibilities of criticism. Another is the problem of relationship between style and form. When there is a disparity, as I believe is the case with the Carter Quartet, one may be able to say something useful, and when neither style nor form make any particular sense, as with the academics, one can say that. Otherwise, what remains, again, is intuitive assertion—that with Sessions there is a firm, though not altogether sure, bond between the excruciated detailed style and the larger formal objectives. As the end of the variations, the modification of the opening motive and 8-bar phrase would make no effect if possibilities were closed off as they would be in a more restrained style. It would not relate at all, let alone meaningfully, if the melodic and harmonic idiom were less "sprung." Here style is justified by the end to which it is employed, and the ugliness transmutes to a larger expressivity. On the other hand, many moments are still troublesome. In this same movement, the subtlety of subsequent variations does not to my ear excuse the crude angularity of the second phrase of the theme. In the very beautiful final *adagio*, the harmonic texture in the *crescendo* to the main climax lacks tension; everything has been spent. Even that superb transition in the first movement seems in itself—I do not speak of its function now—gaudy; we can take bluntness here, but not any lessening of the intensity of consciousness.

Disparity between style and form is felt much more sharply in Sessions' fast movements. In the second movement of the Quartet (*allegro appassionato*), for instance, and especially in the fourth (*presto*), momentary events do not find the leisure to make their stubbornly elaborate points. We have swirled by to the next detail before the last one has sunk in—as though *Parsifal* were being played at a spanking *allegro scorrevole*. Consequently formal relationships and the overall plan grow irrelevant, for what can be seen on paper or even conceived in the mind as the composer's intention is not borne out in the ear. As though aware of this difficulty, Sessions in his fast movements seems to me to make self-conscious, ferocious efforts to achieve emphasis. This only makes things worse: everything sounds not only over-composed, but over-articulated. The logical outcome is anonymity of expression, which contrasts strangely with the sense of clear personality in the *adagios* and *lentos*.

At fast tempos one notices that Sessions' rhythm is often awkward, and awkward to no expressive point. We have all received icy looks for making uncomplimentary statements about the rhythmic style of chromatic-wing composers, such as Schoenberg. Isn't there a *greater* rhythm, a function not just of crass duration pattern, but of harmonic weight, contrapuntal direction, phrasing, and the rest? Certainly, but pulse is pulse, and Sessions moves no more easily when it comes to rhythm than when it comes to melody. And the trouble is precisely that the fast movements provide no subtle weight; the contextual force is essentially miscalculated. His most recent work, the Third Symphony, shows, I believe, a significant advance in rhythmic refinement, though the older brash and bumptious quality, evident in the Quartet, still remains.

In short, Sessions lacks a comfortable norm of vigorous movement and vigorous expression to match the mature expressivity of his slow movements. His problem is the opposite of Carter's, in a way. In slow motion, Carter's textures based on staggered speeds are inclined to drag to death. At a fast clip, Sessions' rich polyphony tends to turn into chatter.

Sessions' Second Quartet is built on slow movements, with the fast ones clearly subsidiary—a simple circumstance which accounts for much of its success. Both of the fast movements (second and fourth) are short, and though undistinguished in themselves, take their places more or less unproblematically as spacers within the main action. For it is a single action; like the late Beethoven quartets, this one creates the profound illusion of a single realized journey. Themes do not need to come back from one movement to another when a secure intuition for spontaneous form is worked out on the largest level. The opening *lento* fugue explores, expands, dares, and waits, as classic in its structure and function as the opening of Op. 131. The theme and variations is central in expression as well as in position, on account of its extent, its severity of dissonance, and its complexity of form. The *adagio* epilogue reflects and resolves. Most impressive is the final passage of extinction: as the texture thins, the long oscillating violin line seems to hover and settle around a goal to which the entire work has been tending. The effect is of light dully concentrated after long, slow flickering; the final chord—*morendo*—is perfectly fixed in space.

At once individual and traditional, Sessions' work is excellently in accord with his own remarks about his objectives as artist. The ideal of expressivity runs like a tough leitmotiv through his many writings on music. Among the most recent of these is an article in *The Score* of September 1956, "Song and Pattern in Music Today"—his wisest piece yet, in fact the one essential, right-headed, and God knows authoritative statement about the present situation in musical composition. Sessions criticizes with real understanding the preoccupation of the current generation with "total organization"; along with much else, he pleads once again for a commitment to expressivity as the basic rationale for artistic activity. As I understand him, Sessions' use of the word "song" here is broad enough, extending certainly to the Beethovenian conception of significant form. That is the nice thing about a leitmotiv: you can twist it around a good deal without losing the kernel of correlative sense.

Let me twist it a little more. Sessions' plea, I think, can be entered with much point on a more elementary level: for song as conceived by Handel, Mozart, the man in the street, and by Beethoven in the extraordinary slow movements of his last period—the *adagio* prior to the finale in Op. 131, the Cavatina in Op. 130, the two tunes in the slow movement of the Ninth Symphony. Beethoven did not write such melody by lowering imaginative sights or by turning away from radical issues of harmony, fugue, and significant form; just the reverse. As a young man he had found that he could write prettily enough. Later he appears to have renounced consciously his melodic inheritance in favor of a violent, awkward struggle for a new individual lyricism, apposite to his total compositional intent. That this was gained in the end is the real measure of Beethoven's greatness.

The shadow of Beethoven is the clearest of many that darken the agony of Adrian Leverkühn in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*. And in this magnificent, over-composed allegory, everything hinges on "the break-through to the subjective"—which is the last equivocal triumph of the Composer as Hero, the last hopeless hope of prideful *contritio* that attests to Faust's problematic redemption. We may not hear in the mind's ear any such break-through in the cello high G at the end of Adrian's last composition, and we may well stay clear of Mann's thoroughly entwined meta-physical and metamusical systems. But if the terms are taken as flexibly as Mann would have wished, we can scarcely deny that something quite essential in the contemporary musical scene is touched on here. Each of our major composers has in his own way arrived at a lyricism by a process that can be compared (remotely to be sure, but I think significantly) with the development in Beethoven; and more remotely, with that in Leverkühn. One hears song emerge in the last movement, particularly, of the Sessions Quartet. So this work, in its passionate, puritan way, encompasses something of a break-through for the composer; and I should say also for American music.

(To be continued)

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OLIVIER TODD

Paris Letter

A FEW WEEKS AGO, beating the English at the difficult game of Understatement, M. Pierre Pflimlin coyly declared that "the situation was ambiguous." He could have meant that responsible or irresponsible leaders in Paris did not know where they were going and that in many cases they were admirably helped by professional intellectuals who suddenly discovered the thrilling virtues of Strength, Power and Prestige. Facts and principles were abominably confused; some changed their position overnight. François Mauriac, after having for months torn Guy Mollet to pieces in *L'Express*, came to see the Socialist leader as a new Joan of Arc. Jean Amrouche switched from a firm defense of North African nationalism to an odd mystical gaullism. The ill-defined contours of the literary scene reflect the ideological and esthetic woolliness of numerous writers. The situation is one of political decline, in which liberal intellectuals remain helpless.

M. André Malraux, as General de Gaulle's Provisional Minister of Ideas, has had the stage to himself. He has been able to indulge in one of his favourite pastimes: the cryptic, distant, universal monologue in front of a large audience. He was once a romantic revolutionary. Now he has become a bureaucratic backstage politician. Prophetic and haughty, he can talk endlessly about everything in general and nothing in particular. In some eyes, especially those of the so-called left-wing intellectual gaulists, he has realized the magic union of thought and action. They never attempt to explain why, from a vague left-wing hero, he has become the precise shadow of a thoroughly conservative chauvinistic leader. Malraux has unquestionably added an aura and a myth to this government of technocrats. It is assumed that a novelist who has written his books in Shanghai during the general strike, and on the Madrid front, could not forsake humanism and the basic liberties that must go with it. Even those who were never taken in by communist hero-worship do not seem to find it at all odd that Malraux should add the paratrooper to his private museum of epic figures. In his wild Musée Grévin they are the "knights of modern times." Indeed, since Barrès no writer has had such an exalted style. And no writer has so *successfully* made a fool of himself.

For many years now, terrified and ignorant critics have clamoured not only that Malraux was the most important French novelist of the first half of the 20th century—which is probably true—but also, on the grounds of his series of art books, a tremendous philosopher. Anglo-Saxon commentators have seen through his bluff, but not their continental Latin colleagues, still suffering from chronic Hegelianitis. Their reasoning and attitude rest on a curious syllogism:

La Condition Humaine and *L'Espoir* are superb modern, revolutionary works,

La Métamorphose des Dieux is an admirable summation of metaphysical aesthetics

. . . Malraux's political pronouncements are highly important—even when his utterances are meaningless, or palpably false, or turgid. As E. H. Gombrich once said, "it is surely more charitable to assume that strings of names and rows of images function like the names of divinities in ancient incantations to reassure the writer rather than the reader." In the long run the 1958 Malraux will look as obtuse as the 1848 Lamartine, and far more irrational.

It is extremely difficult to open a review nowadays without coming across some obscure and pretentious exegesis of *The Book*. In one of the last issues of *Esprit* Mme. Dominique Aubier, for instance, writes characteristically:

The vision of a writer implies a sort of mental "sight." One does not attempt to reconstruct this third eye of the mind from the images it produces. Yet nothing is so fascinating as the penetration of mental phenomena and, ultimately, Art has perhaps no other function than to provide us untiringly with the concrete forms finally created by the mind to enable us in turn to visualize, through them, that from which they proceeded. . .¹

And so on for six pages of uninformative, would-be expressionistic platitudes. I have nothing against *Esprit*, which is still one of our best monthlies, but I think it is significant that it should also go in for this kind of writing. In a country where Albert Camus was once thought to be a great thinker, it is hardly surprising, but it is nevertheless distressing. Malraux and the various forms of Malrauxism are symptoms both of a French tradition and of an intellectual disease. The former, going back to Voltaire and Diderot at least, is simply the Sartrean *engagement*, the legitimate right of writers to voice their opinions on moral and political questions and to express them in their creative works. The latter is a more recent habit. It consists in using a pseudo-philosophical linguistic sauce, peppered up with dubious Marxist, existentialist and psychoanalytic ingredients. Thus it is extremely fashionable to talk in a wonderfully abstract manner of Poujade, beefsteak or Marilyn Monroe. With Roland Barthes, this kind of performance can be amusing. With others it is straightforwardly boring.

The crisis in French thought has been brilliantly and savagely analyzed by Jean-François Revel, one of the most promising young essayists, in *Pourquoi des Philosophes?* Well-received by the cultivated reading public, it was awarded the anti-conformist Félix Fénéon prize. Among other things it includes a devastating analysis and criticism of academic philosophy. It shows that there has been a complete divorce between the progress of the various sciences and that of philosophy, official or esoteric, as well as a most unfortunate development of a debased philosophico-literary vocabulary, damaging both to literature and to philosophy. Revel's attacks

¹ I have translated this and all following quotations—O. T.

on Heidegger were certainly badly needed in France. Strangely enough, by different means, he arrives at the same conclusions as Carnap. Yet his conception of philosophy is much wider than that of any logical-positivist. Revel sums up his reprimands vigorously:

Our philosophy is a particular case of imitative magic. It is to knowledge what magic is to action, or the "prayer mill" of the Tibetan monks to meditation. It is by preserving *words* borrowed from cycles of problems which have become foreign to us, and essentially inconceivable, that it claims to renew itself. Vain and timid revolutions, too frequent not to appear suspicious, and so ludicrous, so invisible, so lamentably confined to the same small circle of fundamentally unchangeable exercises, as much lacking, alas, in "esprit de géométrie" as in "esprit de finesse." Thus, privilege of the longwinded and the stodgy, philosophy misses everything: it oscillates between an hypocritical humanism, an eclecticism made of second hand knowledge, etymological hocus-pocus in the Heideggerian manner, pedantic platitudes and unavowed theology.

Then, indeed, what is the use of philosophers? Or, at any rate, of *those* philosophers, if their philosophy has become the opposite of philosophy, if the first instrument of liberation has gradually deteriorated into this vacuous litany of formulae received from every layer of time and from every corner of space, and if the so-called school of rigor is now nothing but the refuge of intellectual sloth and moral cowardice?

Revel has also published a novel, *Histoire de Flore*, and a provocative essay on Italy, *Pour l'Italie*. In all his books one finds a sharp lucidity accompanied by humour.

This last is getting more and more uncommon. One wonders if lack of humour isn't one of the main common characteristics of all those novelists—Alain Robbe-Grillet, Claude Simon, Michel Butor, Robert Pinget, Paul Gegauff, Nathalie Sarraute—who are conveniently grouped under the heading of "New Realists," presumably because one of their constant preoccupations is a systematic escapism from Reality in its more concrete aspects. Among them, there is one theoretician, Robbe-Grillet. His critical appetite allows him to swallow paradoxes, truisms, self-contradictions and pure nonsense. "Instead of a universe of meanings (psychological, social and functional)," he says, "one must try to construct a more solid, more immediate world." He is fascinated by what he calls "objects" and "gestures." To him they are the essential stuff of any novel. He believes that they ought "to dominate and crush any explanatory theory that would enclose them in a system of reference, whether it be sentimental, sociological, Freudian or metaphysical." He does away with the *roman à thèse*: "Art if it is anything is EVERYTHING. It is sufficient unto itself and there is nothing beyond it." In certain circles with "progressive" views this is supposed to be a profound remark.

In Robbe-Grillet's last novel, one of the three main characters, the woman, has no name. She goes about as "A." The friend—who may also

be the lover—is “Frank.” The third, the narrator, has no identity. Robbe-Grillet used to be an engineer and he overuses the vocabulary of the mathematician, writing of “angles of so many degrees,” “x kilometers,” as if things had to be set in a kind of eternal mathematics to gain a valid literary status. Descriptions, which are supposed to be objective because they include numbers, disintegrate all dialogue. The unique quality of Robbe-Grillet’s style may perhaps be sensed from one passage:

Now the shadow of the south-west pillar—at the angle of the terrace on the bedroom side—is projected on the ground in the garden. The sun, still low in the sky towards the east, falls almost in line with the valley. The rows of banana trees, slanted obliquely from the axis of the valley, are everywhere clearly outlined in this light.

From the back to the top of the upper rooms, on the hillside opposite the one where the house is built, the counting of the trees is quite easy, particularly facing the house, since the plots situated there have been recently planted.

Here, the hollow has been cleared across most of its width. Now there remains only a bush border of about 30 yards, on the edge of the plateau which is connected to the side of the valley by a rounded ridge, with no sharp crest or rocky break.

The separation between the uncultivated area and the banana plantation is not perfectly straight. It is a broken line, with alternately in-going and jutting angles whose vertices each belong to a different plot, planted at a different time, but in general identically oriented.

The originality is unquestionable, but, in the treatment of the décor, means seem to have become ends. When we have finished *La Jalousie* or *Les Gommès* or *Le Voyeur* we may look at ordinary objects more perceptively but we do not know more about the world or ourselves. In the long run, it is the fear of the 1950’s and of their macroscopic problems that has bogged down so many writers to microscopic narrations. It is a great pity that Marguerite Duras with *Moderato Cantabile* and Jean Reverzy with *Le Corridor* should have abandoned classical novel-writing for these *arrière-garde* experiments. At times one is tempted to regret the existence of Proust’s *madeleine* and to feel that Dostoevsky, Kafka and Joyce could be shelved for a while.

The plain truth is that there has been nothing absolutely outstanding recently. Roger Vailland’s *La Loi* was an extremely clever novel, but his best books are still *Drôle de Jeu* and perhaps *Les Mauvais Coups*. We get the usual ration of futile writings by Roger Peyrefitte or Louise de Vilmorin as well as the straightforward rubbish by Paul Vialar, Michel de Saint-Pierre or Maurice Toesca. The age has the literature it deserves. *L’Outrage* by Paul Tillard is fairly significant though unfortunately not very convincing technically. It is the story of a professional communist who, after the last war, goes through a stalinist concentration camp. It was a good subject and one which members of the C.P. do not usually tackle on a literary level, but it requires at least Koestler’s gift for psychological in-

vestigation. Somehow we don't believe in Franz, the hero of *L'Outrage*. He's too much of a symbolical puppet. And, worse still, we do not pity him. Yet, such as it is, this novel is part of the general protest coming from many communist intellectuals, in revolt—once more!—against the party line since Nagy's execution. The rebellion however has not produced a masterpiece for the time being, only lengthy auto-justifications by philosophers like Henri Lefebvre. It is amazing how some dialectically-minded people take years to understand what a common-sensical worker perceives over the week-end. A few years ago Dionys Mascolo explained in *Le Communisme* that French intellectuals found it extremely difficult to be communists and almost equally complicated not to be. Up to a point this *was* true.

The general political and ideological confusion has also had its consequences in the theatre. We have had very few worthwhile plays. There is an economic and an artistic recession. *Paolo Paoli* by Arthur Adamov, with its anti-"belle époque" setting and flavour, was entertaining but not very moving. The most gifted of those playwrights who do not want to write vaudeville, boulevard comedies or masochistic rhapsodies is a younger writer, Michel Vinaver. His *Les Coréens* went far beyond the ordinary play enclosed in a narrow historical context. *Les Huissiers*, which has been published but not staged yet owing to the present political situation (it is concerned in a very subtle and indirect manner with Algeria), is an excellent comedy. Vinaver manages to use a concentrated colloquial language with the most startling effects. *Les Huissiers* first came out in the March issue of *Théâtre Populaire*, which is, incidentally, the best review devoted to the problems of the theatre. Its motto, *l'art peut et doit intervenir dans l'histoire*, cannot of course be to everyone's taste.

In France as elsewhere, when there is too much rain, wine is bad. When there are too many political developments, creative literature pauses. That is probably why criticism has recently been more interesting. There is a groping renewal of Marxist thinking. Marxism is considered again as a method and not as a set of dogmas. People remember once more that the sub-title to *Das Kapital* is *a critique* and not *a treatise*. Small reviews like *Arguments*, *Tribune Marxiste*, *Voies Nouvelles*, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* are born every month. They are well-meaning and often informative, but they do not fully avoid pomposity. Oddly enough, the main contributions to Marxism in the last few years have come from religious milieux. It is a current joke that our best Marxists are Jesuit fathers—Bigo, Chambre or Calvez.

The most satisfying book from a literary and political point of view I have found recently has been Alexis de Tocqueville's *Voyages en Angleterre, Ireland, Suisse et Algérie*. It forms the second part of Volume V of the Collected Works, admirably edited by J. P. Mayer, and, read in 1958 together with the *Correspondance Anglaise*, is indeed illuminating. "A liberal of a new kind," as he liked to style himself, Tocqueville wrote an extraordinarily clear and vivid French. In the 1830's he used a prose still full of the crisp elegance of the 18th century, unspoilt by romantic heaviness. An aristocratic democrat, he was interested in all aspects of English life

without being a tiresome anglomaniac. Whether he was dealing with a rowdy meeting, or Foreign Office archives, or the condition of the lower classes, or the decentralization of government, or Irish nationalism, or the Swiss constitution, he always threw practical and theoretical light on the facts and problems he discussed. One cannot help feeling he has not yet been granted the place he deserves in France as a sociologist and a philosopher of history. Of course he is harder on British colonialism in Ireland than on French colonialism in Algeria—which he visited in 1841. Nevertheless, and however much one may distrust parallels and prophecies, reading his notes on North African affairs a hundred years later is a curious experience. Having watched the military authorities at work, he wrote:

. . . I wondered what could be the future of a country left in the hands of such men and where this accumulation of violence and injustice would end, if not in the revolt of the natives and the ruin of the Europeans.

What is apparent throughout Africa but especially here, where it is in control, is not only the natural coarseness and brutality of military power, but the burning, unintelligent hatred of the soldier for the civilian. Although the civilian population in fact fosters the army, there is against it in the army a sort of raging jealousy. Soldiers cannot own land. The idea that they should offer their lives for the benefit of those who come here only to make a fortune maddens them. We have met this idiotic feeling in all ranks, and General Bugeaud is its personification.

There's no doubt about it: in the French tradition of political literature and literary politics, Tocqueville is a far more attractive writer and thinker than MM. Malraux and Soustelle.

July 1958

Notes on Contributors (cont.)

A novel by OLIVIER TODD, *Une Demi-Campagne*, was brought out by Julliard last year. He is at present at work on a new novel, to be called *L'Été de Chelsea*.

ARTHUR J. KNODEL, of the University of Southern California, is the author of a number of articles on St.-John Perse.

JOHN THOMPSON is executive

director of a philanthropic organization, The Fairfield Foundation, in New York City. He is engaged in writing a novel and a history of English meters.

VIVIAN MERCIER is at work on a critical study, *The Irish Comic Tradition*.

A novel by BENJAMIN DE MOTT, entitled *Skim Pick, A Tale of the Old East*, will be published next spring.

Reviews

ARTHUR J. KNODEL

“Prolific the Image, and the Metre, Prodigal”

A SINGLE FRENCH POEM more than a hundred and seventy pages long, and predominantly lyrical at that. The prospect is frightening. But the format of the present bilingual edition¹ is so exquisite that even the most recalcitrant reader will be tempted at least as far as the first page of English text. He will find only ten lines on that first spacious page, but they suffice to identify immediately the author of the poem. The frequent vocatives, the vocabulary at once ceremonious and technical, the repeated “like” unabashedly introducing a string of similes—all bespeak Saint-John Perse. Here again in *Seamarks* (French *Amers*) we find the unique tone that Perse has sustained since 1904, when he wrote his first important poems.

The surficial uniformity of his work is undeniable. I say “surficial,” and not “superficial,” because the uniformity is real and important, not merely apparent and negligible. Indeed, this surface is so richly and strangely wrought that a reader may quite understandably become so engrossed in it that he does not get beyond it. But in that event he may become the easy victim of other similarities in Perse’s various poems—similarities which *are* merely superficial, and he will miss the wealth of human experience that has gone into them. For example, Perse’s last four major poems bear the titles of *Rains*, *Snows*, *Winds*, and *Seamarks* respectively—a simple and rather monotonous meteorological progression, it would seem. Actually the four are very different. *Rains* is a violent, impersonal ritual of ablution. *Snows* is a poignant and extremely personal tribute by the poet to his mother. *Winds*, a very long and complex poem, is a kind of polyphonic epic that has affinities with the earlier, more unilinear epic, *Anabasis*. *Seamarks* is something else again. It is more strictly the celebration of a great natural phenomenon than is any of the three previous poems. It is a sea-poem in every imaginable sense, but as the poem itself states, “a chant of the sea as has never been chanted.” It is likewise the longest and perhaps the most important poem that Perse has written to date.

Almost all of the French text of *Seamarks* was published fragmentarily in various periodicals before the poem finally appeared *in toto* in the 1957 edition published in France. But even though these fragments were very extensive, their isolation from each other and the sequence of their publica-

¹ SEAMARKS, by St.-John Perse, translated by Wallace Fowlie. Bollingen Series LXVII. Pantheon Books. \$6.00.

tion (which does not at all correspond to their definitive places in the complete ensemble) made it impossible to grasp any all-embracing continuity and even aroused the suspicion that there was no such continuity. But now that all the fragments are in place, the powerful cumulative effect of the poem is evident.

Seamarks turns out to be a vast choric ode. Its basic framework is the ritualistic—as opposed to the narrative and dramatic—aspects of classical Greek drama.

Poetry to accompany the march of a recitation in honour of the Sea.

Poetry to assist the song of a march round the circuit of the Sea.

Like the ritual round the altar and the gravitation of the chorus in the circuit of the strophe.

These lines occur in the first major division of the poem, the “Invocation.” This “Invocation” is addressed directly to the sea, and in it the poem’s purpose, style, and methods are explicitly defined. Here, too, the poet tells us his attitude towards his subject: He will let himself be, so far as it is humanly possible, the passive mouthpiece through which the sea speaks. Yet he knows that “of the Sea itself it will not be question, but of its reign in the heart of man.” It is in the last section of this first part that the sea brings to shore the varied stock-characters of ancient drama, characters in search of their poet and speaking a new sea-language “with great reliefs of images and luminous slopes of shadow, running to its massive splendours of a very fine periodic style . . .”

Next comes the lengthy “Strophe.” Its first section contrasts the peoples and regions of the interior with the coast-towns and their population. The sea-port is established as the hemicycle confronting the stage, which is the sea. Through several long sections we witness the assembling of the chorus—a chorus which, significantly reversing the all-male character of the Greek drama, is made up entirely of women; beneath their masks of heroes, monster, envoys, and slaves, they are *tragédiennes*. The first band of *tragediennes* cries out for relief from land-locked boredom and staleness, and soon they are joined by the patrician matrons, then by a young prophetess, and presently by the matrons’ daughters, all gathering before the sea, before the stage of the longed-for but still unwritten drama. All clamor for a man from the sea who will break the spell. In Section VIII a man of the sea does appear, a lone foreigner who sails along the coast.

The nexus of the poem—the crest of the immense wave, so to speak—comes in the fifty-some pages of Section IX of the “Strophe.” In it the implorings of the assembled chorus are answered in the antiphon of the lovers, of Woman and Man. The sea becomes the reservoir, not only of the receptivity of the female, but of all the vagrant restlessness of the male, who finds the ultimate reconciliation of freedom and security, for himself and for his beloved, only in dedication to the sea. I know of no celebration of the sexual act as extensive, as powerful, as magnificently ceremonious, and as poignant as this. Every figurative device is drawn upon: the most

oblique and the most direct, the most rigidly condensed and the most intricately elaborated. And the whole thing is carried forward by a compelling periodic rhythm that culminates in an orgasm of fulfillment and subsides into deep post-coital calm and sadness. It is a ritual copulation, the climax of the ceremonial drama of the sea; or rather, it is a supreme human drama that achieves full meaning only when invested by the ceremonial of the sea.

That ceremonial is concluded in the poem's last major division, the "Chorus." Led by the Poet, the chorus sings an ode of thanksgiving to the sea, which has become a pervasive power that in some way informs every significant human act. The tone is one of ecstatic calm, nowhere better expressed, perhaps, than in the weightless trance of the skin-diver:

. . . but there we live, and unclothed, where the flesh itself is no longer flesh and the fire itself is no longer flame—in the radiant sap and the very precious seed: in all this green of green dawn, like a single vast leaf infused and luminous . . .

Unity regained! presence recovered! O Sea, shining instance and flesh of great lunations. It is light made substance for us, and the clearest part of Being brought to light, as in the sliding of the sword out of its sheath of red silk.²

This quotation may be taken as a representative sample of the prolific imagery of the poem. So seamless is the interlocking of the images in this brief fragment that one is hardly aware of how abundant they really are. First the flesh is said to be no longer flesh, since, for the diver, it is divested of its weight, of that very essence of his "fleshiness" when he is on land. Then comes the analogy with fire that is not fire. For, when the sun's rays converge under water, that "flame" is cold, is no longer fire. But it is still radiant. And the water becomes "radiant sap" and "very precious seed"—the sea, cradle of life and nourisher of myriad forms of life. But sap and seed are vegetable, and the water is then compared to a single vast leaf, as of some huge tropical plant, through which early sunlight filters: "green of green dawn." And so on, up to the final simile of the sword being drawn from its silken sheath.

Most American readers familiar with Perse know him chiefly for his *Anabasis*, so they may be struck by the contrast between the imagery in that earlier work and the imagery found in *Seamarks*. In *Anabasis* the units of imagery tend to be discrete "monads," of a piece throughout. In *Seamarks* the unit is composite and extended, in some instances layered and overlapping, like waves breaking over each other. For example, the quotation just given is really only part of a single image-unit. The effect is one of massive fluidity, most appropriate to the poem's subject.

This wealth of imagery is reinforced by varying rhythms and by the complex sonorous devices that one can find analyzed in such detail in Roger Caillois' *Poétique de St.-John Perse*. Unfortunately, only a small part of these can possibly come through in translation. But the *données* of which

²The English text (p. 332) actually reads "sheath of green silk." But the French original, in both the present edition and the earlier French one (Gallimard: 1957), clearly has: "sa gaine de soie rouge."

the images are composed do, of course, come through. They are multifarious and include the strange—sometimes almost miraculous—details of natural phenomena, the objects and actions of anthropological interest (ceremonial gear, strange artifacts, peculiar customs), the technical details of unfamiliar trades and callings—in short, that odd assortment that we have come to associate with Perse.

Some readers not merely associate these curious data with Perse's poetry, they practically *equate* them with it. It is this equation that accounts to a great degree for the widely-shared impression that Perse's poetry suffers from a "museum" quality and is, at best, "literary." Even so judicious a commentator as C. A. Hackett writes of Perse: "... the poet, while showing his familiarity with the world, politely keeps it at a distance," and he quotes a well-known passage from Perse's letter to Archibald MacLeish to illustrate "the connoisseur's highly specialized and selective interests." Hackett's conclusion is that Perse's poetry "is essentially 'literary,' and has the limitations, and the virtues, which that word implies" (*Anthology of Modern French Poetry*, pp. 269-270).

"Essentially 'literary,'" I presume, means preoccupied with technique and form to the detriment of live, or at least *lived*, content. One thinks of Valéry's scant regard for subject-matter in his poetry and of his frequent reduction of that subject-matter to what Hackett nicely characterizes as "states of mind which are, after all, only preliminaries to living." But Perse's poetry is of precisely the opposite sort. It is not in quest of pure form, nor is there anything mummified or glass-encased about it.

The situation of Perse's poetry may be clarified if we regard the relationship between "literary" and "lived" poetry as somewhat like that between formal politeness and true tact. Tact may sometimes involve obliquity and indirection; but if it does, this "round-aboutness" is dictated by the live and deep concern which is the essence of tact. Formal politeness, on the other hand, is nothing *but* obliquity and indirection. And formal politeness may have a certain abstract beauty about it, just as there is undoubted beauty in "literary" poetry when the gestures and attitudes it embodies are those of a great technician. Now the curious "museum" assortment of data in Perse's poetry implements an obliquity and indirection that are at times very great and that may put an occasional strain on even the most favorably disposed reader. But this circumlocution—and *Sea-marks* is full of it—is never gratuitous; it is always the outgrowth of a deep concern for a live phenomenon; it is imposed by Perse's supreme tact. His obliquities are like the precautions that a biologist may take to keep intact some cell or tissue that is peculiarly difficult to get at, but which is at the very heart of the vital process he is studying.

But I suspect there is another source of the accusation of literariness brought against Perse, and that is the apparent remoteness of his poetry from contemporary events and preoccupations. What, for example, could be more anachronistic than a poem about the sea with Aeschylean and Homeric overtones? Not only is Perse's work supremely *untopical*; it

cannot even be remotely considered as illustrating any social or intellectual "ism". Perse is in quest of something timeless. But he seeks this timelessness not in the creation of a poem-*objet d'art* which aspires to pure, independent form, but in the embracing of concrete experience in the aspects that have been most compelling to him and may give him access to underlying elemental forces.

In that quest, however, it would be difficult to find a more genuinely contemporary poet, for Perse moves in a world that embraces all times and climes, all conditions and races and creeds. His world is that of the modern historians and scientists who are trying to synthesize the bewilderingly abundant data of experience as comprehensively as possible. In this regard, such names as Malraux and Toynbee have been mentioned in connection with Perse. I should prefer, rather, to substitute the name of some biologist—say Julian Huxley—for that of Toynbee; for the sciences, especially the natural sciences, play a very special role in the substance and technique of Perse's poetry. So peculiar is their role, that it calls for an extended discussion beyond the scope of this review. Suffice it to say here that it is not surprising that the lore and lingo of the oceanographer are everywhere present in *Seamarks*.

I have ventured to say that *Seamarks* is perhaps Perse's most important poem. I think this true because the poem successfully embodies a sum of experiences that have been of the greatest moment in Perse's life. He has lived the sea in the most immediate sense. He was born amid Antillean waters, where he very early learned to sail. He explored, in craft of his own, more of the Seven Seas than is permitted to most men. The sea surges through almost all of his poems; it is even audible in the land-locked *Anabasis*. The sea, as it did for Conrad and Masefield, embodies for Perse what he feels to be most significant in human life. *Seamarks* is, thus, a culmination. "It had been such a long time that I had nursed a taste for this poem," he reiterates in the "Invocation." So, completely master of his medium after all these years, Perse has at last satisfied this longing and set down his most sumptuous poem.

Perse, fortunately for us, is one of those rare poets whose work translates well. There are several reasons for this, but the most important, I believe—along with Alain Bosquet—resides in the predominant role of imagery in Perse's poetry, as compared with the much less easily translatable sonorous elements. Thus, if a translation of Perse is denotatively accurate, it is assured of being at least readable.

When the first installment of Wallace Fowlie's translation of *Amers* appeared in the magazine *Poetry* in 1951, it looked as if even denotative accuracy was not to be hoped for—so replete was this first sample with outright errors and gross inaccuracies. And its prosiness and awkward phrasing had almost nothing Persean left in them. Subsequent installments in *The Yale Review* (Spring 1955) and *Poetry* (July 1955) already revealed great improvement, and the final total version, still further revised, has fortunately retained very few of the objectionable qualities of that first

sample. I suspect that Perse's active collaboration had something to do with the progressive change for the better. In any case, Fowlie's final "Bollingen version" is certainly denotatively accurate and is, therefore, a valuable aid in reading the very difficult French of the original text.³

But the very way in which the poem is printed, with the entire French text followed by the entire English text, indicates that the translation was not intended solely as a pony. It is also meant to be judged as an independent entity. The indispensable requirement of such an independent translation is that it preserve a good measure of the poetic flavor of the original, while at the same time preserving its autonomy as English; i.e. we should not be conscious of reading a translation. Read in that light, I did not find Fowlie's translating job quite up to those of Denis Devlin and Hugh Chisholm, his predecessors in the Bollingen series—though I am aware that *Amers* was a larger order than confronted either Devlin or Chisholm. Many whole strophes and phrases in *Seamarks* do come off with a ring worthy of the original, especially in the Lovers' Antiphon, "Narrow are the vessels . . ." Nevertheless, there still remains a good deal of prosiness and un-English awkwardness. And, inevitably, there are many renderings I would quarrel with; but my quarrel is most often over some nuance that involves preferences that are highly subjective and, thus, *non disputandum est*. Nowhere, however, has Perse been grossly betrayed.

But, whatever its virtues as an independent entity, it is still my hope—as I suspect it is Mr. Fowlie's also—that the chief virtue of this translation will be to incite the reader to grapple with the original French. For Perse exploits the unsuspected riches of French syntax and phonology in a magnificent way that is entirely his own, and nowhere more than in *Amers*.

Finally, one should remember what Perse himself insists upon in the "Invocation" when he reiterates that his poem is "une récréation du coeur." His poem does indeed appeal to the heart much more than to the mind or senses—if we take care to eliminate all mawkishly sentimental associations from that much-abused word "heart." The poem should be approached as we would approach a great and complex piece of music. I do not pretend to grasp the precise intent and poetic justification of every image and phrase of *Amers*; but each time I return to it I "hear" more, the separate elements coalesce increasingly, and the whole thing becomes more continuously meaningful and satisfying.

³ One lexical detail that struck me in passing: The English version (p. 270) retains the French "criste-marine," which conveys nothing to an English-speaking reader and is found neither in Webster nor in the Oxford Dictionary. The perfectly accurate English equivalent "samphire" would have done the job nicely.

JOHN THOMPSON

Just a Bit of This and That¹

STANLEY KUNITZ's *Selected Poems 1928-1958* is his third book and includes most of the poems from his first and second books, of 1930 and 1944. Fellow poets have covered it with laurel: Marianne Moore for the "poetic eye," Richard Wilbur for "every technical virtue," Robert Lowell for "savage, symbolic drive," Theodore Roethke for "truly passionate speech." As you see, each poet has named his own quality. But they are not just looking in the mirror; all these qualities are to be found in Kunitz's poems—somewhere.

Reading these poems, you don't feel that you are hearing different things about the world of one imagination. The poems of the thirty years are not sorted out here, it is true, and this may have something to do with the sound of different voices, talking about different things.

There is no doubt that the best poems are among the later ones, but some of the worst ones are, too. The earlier poems are gnomic lyrics or symbolic fantasies; the reader may find that the words conjure up some experience of his own to give the poem a subject, or he may not. The language often tries to intensify, without success:

*In glassy prison now of contemplation
I, fugitive from progress, leap erect
In analytic dance on time's acute
And bitter needle. Crueler than a spine
It penetrates the body till it pricks
The bubbling brain, exploding life's gray tumor
Together with its iridescent world.*

Surely a grotesque ingenuity, and so serious! If we see the image at all, there must be something comic in it, even if it were only the horrid obscenity of such a death; but it is not really meant to be seen, any more than calling the needle "acute and bitter" is meant to contribute to our understanding of the needle: needles can't help being "acute akin to L. acus needle . . . *acere* to be sour."

Later, when he writes about the death of a real insect, not the pretended death of a man pretending to be a bug, Kunitz can manage real horror. "The Dragonfly" is very similar to "The Groundhog," and it is

¹ SELECTED POEMS 1928-1958, by Stanley Kunitz. Atlantic-Little, Brown. \$3.75. I MARRY YOU, by John Ciardi. Rutgers University Press. \$2.75. MIRRORS AND WINDOWS, by Howard Nemerov. University of Chicago Press. \$2.75. POEMS OF A JEW, by Karl Shapiro. Random House. \$3.50. A CRACKLING OF THORNS, by John Hollander. Yale University Press. \$3.00. SEEING IS BELIEVING, by Charles Tomlinson. McDowell, Obolensky. \$3.00. A CONEY ISLAND OF THE MIND, by Lawrence Ferlinghetti. New Directions. \$1.00. POEMS, by Emma Swan. New Directions. \$3.00. OVERLAND TO THE ISLANDS, by Denise Levertov. Jonathan Williams. \$2.75.

as good as Eberhart's poem, too. Here the real "poetic eye" is used:

*What a gallantry of pomp
In that royal spread of wings!—
Four leaves of thinnest mica,
Or, better, of the skin
Of water, if water had a skin.*

The dragonfly has fallen to the ground and he is being carried off by ants. The poet watches and fancies things about St. George (Why not? he says) and resurrection.

*But then I saw,
When an imperceptible gust
Abruptly hoisted sails
And flipped my hero over. . . .
In the reversal of the scene
I saw the sixfold spasm
Of his tucked-in claws,
The cry of writhing nerve-ends,
And down his membrane-length
A tide of grey propulsion.
I wheeled. . . .*

A reversal indeed. Here no tricks of language are dragged in; the poet has his eye on the object, he makes us see it, and makes us share his feeling. The language is merely exact. As for the mock-heroics that prepare for the shock, they aren't flourishes only; that's just the way to talk about bugs.

Well, there are other good poems, too: "Reflections by a Mailbox," about being drafted into the war, as good as Karl Shapiro; "The War Against the Trees," which begins, "The man who sold his lawn to standard oil"; "The Thief," a strong humorous piece about having a wallet lifted in Rome; many small conceits perfectly done, among them "Confidential Instructions," "This Day the World," "The Economist's Song"; and of the symbolic poems, "Invocation," "Vita Nuova," "Last Words," "Welcome the Wrath."

The effect of too many voices remains, and of too much ingenuity. "The Science of the Night" goes on in an extended figure, with stylish allusions to astronomy; "Foreign Affairs" cheapens Auden's old "frontier" conceit to make it suitable for magazine consumption: "We are two countries girded for the war," it begins, and you can imagine how it goes on from there, with agents and headlines and diplomats.

But in some of the longer poems Kunitz has indeed a considerable strength, and a humor and balance and purpose that most of the book lacks. In poems like "Night Letter," an anthology of themes from the 'thirties, Kunitz simply went limp, in limp run-on lines, before the plagues of his age—whereas Auden, among other things, had a lot of bounce and spirit in the pleasure of naming all the fearful villains. The poems I have

called my favorites have strength of sight and language, and they may turn out to be, if they are not simply isolated performances, the first news from a world that is being explored.

The subject of *I Marry You* is, of course, married love, and John Ciardi comes down on it like a ton of bricks. But how to tell one of his admirers that this is heaviness, lumpishness, and not solidity?

ADMIRER (*Reading*)—

*. . . you turn, abandoned and naked, all let down
in ferny streams of sleep and petaled thighs
rippling into my flesh's buzzing garden.*

What are you making that silly face for? Are you so squeamish you can't stand real physical stuff?

NON-ADMIRER—Well, no, but . . . well, if only it weren't a garden. And then, if it weren't buzzing, like a pail full of flies. And, well, if only, if only it weren't *his*. Maybe if he were talking about somebody else. . . .

A.—Come on, you know poems are masks, and all that. And at least he didn't say this, like Dylan Thomas:

*Nor when my love lies in the cross-boned drift
Naked among the bow-and-arrow birds
Shall you turn cockwise on a tufted axle.*

I don't see you making any funny faces now.

NON-A.—No, but it makes you wonder. . . . It's as if all the generals had come to Lincoln *asking* for the brand Grant drank.

A.—Ciardi never said anything as bad as Karl Shapiro, either:

O hideous little bat the size of snot.

I suppose you think that's pretty.

NON-A.—Well, maybe that's the way to talk about bugs. But go on with that poem.

A.—

*Far and familiar your body's myth-map lights,
travelled by moon and dapple. Sagas were curved
like scimitars to your hips. The raiders's ships
all sailed to your one port. . . .*

Cut it out now! This isn't *dirty*. You know what he means. This is sincere.

NON-A.—Sorry. I was just thinking of a poem by Thomas Carew, where there was a navigation problem. But I know that's wrong and has nothing to do with this poem, which really is very sincere. I apologize. Still, these scimitars, this map, now. . . .

A.—As long as you're stuck back in the seventeenth century, why don't you be fussy about John Donne? I'll bet you think it's OK when he says, *My America! My New-found-land!* That's a lot more fantastic than just a map.

NON-A.—Donne was being sort of exuberant and jolly, wasn't he, like Errol Flynn, teasing the girl and himself a little, and flattering; the exaggeration sounds fine to me. If it *is* exaggeration. . . . You know, when you think of a girl like that. . . . Well! Anyway, Donne doesn't call her a *mip*, er, a *myth-map*.

A.—You think our man can't be jolly? Just get a load of this:

*Whatever chucks a rump
I praise a-cackle in the bounce of whee!*

It would be easy to say that Ciardi has learned nothing from his translation of Dante, and let it go at that. But would it be enough to tell him to tone it down, to play it straight, to stop loading his lines with lumps of "imagery"? It's true that they end up with the bloated effect of a head by Arcimboldo, all made of gourds, cucumbers, peas, pears, and cherries. Would the poems really be a great deal better if everything were not so hopped-up? Probably they would. There are good clean lines in the book, as when the man in a poem about being alone while his wife and children are away for two weeks says this:

*I come and go
like a bellhop through a suite. Even the ashtrays
are polished bright as a doll's funeral.*

But that is not a complete answer, and I don't know how the complete answer could be stated in persuasive or analytic terms. There is good baroque poetry in the world. John Ciardi has not written it.

Howard Nemerov, in his fourth book of poems, has mastered a style that is relaxed and reflective; his poems are certainly "as well-written as prose." He does not any longer speak in a crammed portentous voice as he used to do:

*Poor Platonists, we huddle paralyzed
To watch the black complicity of dreams
That dextrous and sinister shuffle past. . . .*

We listen now to an easy, ironic conversation, allusive and witty, somewhat superior, with plenty of time for qualifying and for being courteous, for saying *Of course*, *So it seems to me*, *Well, then*. His favorite form is a relaxed blank verse. This conversationalist can be long-winded, he can be boring:

*But I could think only, Red sun, white moon,
This is a natural beauty, it is not
Theology. For I had fallen from
The symbolized world, where I in earlier days
Found mysteries of meaning, form, and fate
Signed on the sky, and now stood but between
A swamp of fire and a reflecting rock.*

Yes, there hath passed away a glory from the earth, but this would wear out even Wordsworth. Much of the poetry here has this intelligent dullness, and though it is saved more often than not from sheer lecturing by its irony, its wit, still it is mostly a keeping-in-practice, keeping the eyes open and the voice exercised. The only feeling of any real joy in the book is in the poems on writing.

Once in a while an object attracts an unusual concentration of thoughts, as in "The Town Dump," and "Sandpipers." There are several very good humorous poems, "A Primer of the Daily Round," "Reflexions on the Seizure of Suez," "Drama." Only twice, to my mind, does this excellent voice, this wise and civilized poet, bring about the combination of language and observation that shocks us into new and unpredictable awareness of both the language and what the poem is about. Once this event takes place in "An Old Warplane," where the desperate power of nostalgia is evoked very strongly and truly in the simplest possible words:

*Low down and level on the bay,
Pounding her heart out going slow,
Lost at last in the horizon cloud,
She carried pity like a gun. . . .*

And there is a six-line epigram, "Political Reflexion," which detonates its moral with a perfect obscenity; it is not just witty, or humorous, but really funny, like the kind of jokes you never hear any more. It makes you laugh. It would be a very useful epigram for anyone to have by heart.

Karl Shapiro's *Poems of a Jew* is not new, but a collection from his other books of poems, on the theme of his harsh title. I'd like to speak of it here because Shapiro possesses two things that many other poets (and people, or civilians, or whatever we call those who are not poets) lack: convictions and feelings. His convictions may be pig-headed sometimes, but they are his own and he does not hedge them around with ironies. He makes up sentences about them, the most solid and direct he can imagine (he used to have a certain amount of assistance from MacNeice), and he lays them up together solidly, like a log cabin, and there is his poem. He is as literal as can be. He never sets down a word only for its sound, or its association, or its style. Thus he seldom does what most poets do today, that is, write a poem by sliding softly and gracefully from some miniature object to some absolutely cosmic moral.

He can't really handle allegory, or ideas that aren't attached firmly to a person or a thing. An odd innocence shows up here, as in "Black Snow," which according to his notes is about Nazi Germany. But as you read the poem, it is simply a nature-faking event, rather charming and pretty. Not that he means to deal with this unspeakable history in a trivial way, or that he is trying to be charming about it; no, he is in dead earnest, as who wouldn't be. But he plugs away at his conceit of the black snow until the snow is quite real and whatever it means is not important. The literal-minded cannot deal in small allegories—in *small* allegories. If Shapiro

had the right framework, which he will never have, he might be one of those rarest of writers, a real poet of allegory. He has the literal mind for it, like Dante, and the convictions and feelings.

He likes to tell Bible stories over again, under the aspect of Freud, but the angels, birds, and flowers lack the energy of the mothers, automobiles, and sidewalks he describes so well in his other poems. The fables seem empty. In his best poems, Shapiro does not try to go too far; his words have force because they drive straight to the object, and hit it hard, with the power of a good caricature, a Daumier or a Goya, or Pope; he does real damage, as Pope did, and it must be a lasting damage.

*To hurt the Negro and avoid the Jew
Is the curriculum.*

Not many living poets have written about a place lines that will stick to it forever, the way the words of poets used to go with places.

The new young poets are represented here by John Hollander's *A Crackling of Thorns* and Charles Tomlinson's *Seeing is Believing*. Mr. Hollander has a long, long family tree, and he acknowledges it fully. He also has many acquaintances. In his poems we find not only Icarus, Orpah and Susanna, Adam, Dr. Johnson, Eurydice, and well-known people like that, but some who haven't been around for a long time: Jack and Joan, Roseblush, Phoebus, Daphnis and Chloe, Glaucon, my Lady, and poets named Hippolyte and Phoebus.

These people turn up in sestinas, madrigals, villanelles, canzoni, and other songs, done in imitation of Auden and Empson as well as Dryden, Clement Marot, William Shakespeare, and other wits. John Hollander has a fine touch with a song, his phrases are extremely neat and choice: Auden praises all this in his introduction to the book. He has plenty of nerve, too. He tackles Susanna bathing, with effects of light and shade, showing no fear of Stevens's Susanna or Peele's Bathsheba. He has nerve for his serious effects. He opens the book with one hundred and forty-four lines that go on like this, as careful and allusive and ordered and allegorical and anagogical as a lecture in Latin by Gabriel Harvey:

*Was memory to be the philogeny of towers
Or the language of trees? A Past, that honors . . .*

In his best vein, I think, Hollander uses his intense concern with the "literary" to set up an ironic tone for a subject that has some human meaning, and then he lets the human meaning come through. This happens more or less in "For Both of You, the Divorce Being Final," and "A Word Remembered." As for the rest, well, when Holofernes stopped reciting, you remember, Nathaniel said, "A foolish extravagant spirit, full of formes, figures, shapes, objects, Ideas, apprehensions, motions, resolutions, and so on and so on, in the ventricle of memory, and so on; but the gift is good in those in whom it is acute, and I am thankful for it."

At first, Charles Tomlinson's book might appear to be only an album of beautiful color photographs by someone who had run off to Italy with Marianne Moore's camera.

. . . *When we perceive, as keen
As the bridge itself, a bridge inlaying the darkness
Of smooth water, our delight acknowledges our debt—*

And he acknowledges his debt freely, by signing a little poem about a spider with a variation on her phrase: "lifting intangible weights/ Into real walls."

The connoisseurship of design and color is almost ineffably refined; this is a most elegant tourist. In a mausoleum,

*A blurred shadow detaches itself hovering
And cannot decide whether a green or blue
Will the more grace its momentary existence.*

There is more to Tomlinson than elegance, though, and this collection is a real book. The poems add to one another, until the reader finds himself in a new world, a small, coherent, intensely discriminating world, but a world with its own laws. Too coherent! Too discriminating! But the poet knows that, and says, That's exactly what I want, too much coherence, too much discrimination—too much for your world.

He has a trick of making tiny dramas out of what seem to be the most fixed descriptions. The eye moves, discriminates, expects:

*Above, piercing the empty blue,
A gull would convey whiteness
Through the sole space which lacks it
But*

After a while you begin to want to know what happens after these *Buts*, and as you come to understand his feelings, the absurd elegance of his *expertise*, then instead of wearying, you want to see just how he's going to say what you know he has to feel about the next thing, which might be "Van Gogh." And he says something that is amusing, in character, and because it is in character, just. He has a series of poems on nineteenth-century French literature but I couldn't get interested in those.

Tomlinson's view is so sustained—true, it's not very heavy—and so thoroughly understood and defended by him that I feel there is enough power here to develop something more than this microscopic refinement; but this is a very enjoyable book to read, just as it is.

Here and there in the general stupidity of Lawrence Ferlinghetti's *A Coney Island of the Mind* appears a moment of wayward charm. It would be surprising if this were not so. Like the other members of this fashionable set from San Francisco, Ferlinghetti has a desire to expose Things as They Are, by a method which might seem to be strangely adapted to its pur-

pose: he acts childish. For an adult to act childish is almost certainly going to make him stupid but it may also make him attractive, in a way. Few of us are so stern that we don't feel the tug of regression now and then.

*Let's go
Come on
Let's go
Empty our pockets
and disappear.*

To this imaginary bum, who has no purpose but to expose things, and exhibit himself, there is no purpose in anything outside himself, and thus to name is to ridicule. As I said, this can have its charm:

*I have seen a hundred horseless milkwagons
in a vacant lot in Astoria.
Ben Shahn never painted them
but they're there
askew in Astoria.*

Usually, however, the chief feeling is violence, a sense of outrage; the child's incoherent outrage at the adult world, which he thinks he is describing when he says, "a kissproof world of plastic toilet seats tampax and taxis." Just to mention such things is supposed to show how dreadful they are, but if you ask why, you will find no answer but the child's: It shows you're not as great as you think you are, if you go to the toilet.

Nor does the mindlessness defeat its purpose, rather it is supposed to be the next-to-last straw: helpless, broke, and stupid, this figure clowns its own degradation before our eyes. For the last straw, the figure says, smirking, "I like it this way."

No generalizations. None of these books is important enough to warrant comment on the post-Auden scene, or the Lowell scene, or the new bourgeois scene. A few words only on two more books: Emma Swan's *Poems*, a book like a modest well-kept garden, the plants all bought at the nursery, but arranged nicely and cared for very tenderly; a sweet and touching exhibit. Denise Levertov's *Overland to the Islands*, slight, personal, suffering from the infatuated over-attention to inadequate words that comes from using typography instead of prosody; and yet, something personal.

LOUIS SIMPSON

The Ancient Pistol of the Romantics

MARCHAND'S *Byron*¹ is one of the most painstaking lives ever written, perhaps the most; and besides, it seems quite reliable. Having paced out the footsteps of his hero, having consulted all the relevant sources and his own conscience, Marchand presents the significant facts, however embarrassing they may be, and leaves the reader to draw his own conclusions. The book is in fact what it is certain to be called wherever biography is discussed: a triumph of scholarship, thorough, intelligent and impartial. Marchand has not obtruded his opinions; indeed, were it not for a brief publisher's note one might be in danger of forgetting that there is a man named Marchand, and that this is his book. The biography seems to have been composed by a perfect committee who have determined to settle Byron's case once and for all, with no damned nonsense about it. If Annabella Milbanke stands revealed as a vindictive fool, if Byron's clubbed foot seems the key to his personality, it is only because the facts have spilled over. So gradual are the ways by which Marchand leads us that only when we have arrived do we take exception. His prose is as convincing as the voice of the Recording Angel.

It must be remembered that this is a biography. It does not pretend to be criticism. This should dispose of an objection found in one Englishman's review: that Marchand might have paused to evaluate Byron's works. It would have been, after all, a waste of time. Besides, since so much of Romantic literature is autobiographical in content, with so little ambiguity in the style, is not biography the most useful criticism of Byron and his contemporaries? The poetry of Byron, Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley does not lend itself to the techniques of criticism as it is now practised. Where there is an ambiguity in a line by Keats, we can be fairly sure that it is a fault; Keats would have removed it if he could. Never were poets so unable to see the importance of proper literary tactics. They were always getting subject matter into their verse: the French Revolution, skylarks, women—the things they had themselves observed—of these they attempted to make poetry. The intelligent critics of our day have turned from their effusions with disgust, and, indeed, to understand Romantic poetry, it is enough to understand the poets' lives. The Romantics are unworthy of contemporary criticism; let us then, by all means, have biographies instead.

So unobtrusive is Marchand that we may rapidly pass from a discussion of the author to a discussion of his hero. I am afraid this is the penalty Marchand must suffer now and hereafter. In eliminating prejudice he has also eliminated the interest of style. I do not know what Marchand's style is; sometimes he permits himself a fragment of humor or irony, but that is all. From his determination to present the whole

¹BYRON: A BIOGRAPHY by *Leslie A. Marchand*. Knopf (3 vols.). \$20.00.

truth, his unflinching presentation of shocking facts, it is evident that Marchand is a realist in the best, modern university manner. I have a feeling, now and then, that he compels himself to face the facts; but this, of course, may only be my own reluctance to face them. The description, for example, of the burning of the bodies of Williams and Shelley is a far cry from the impression we have received from other books. "Hunt could not bear to witness the gruesome scene and remained in the carriage. Byron soon wandered away and swam out to the *Bolivar*, which was anchored about a mile and a half from shore." Trelawny remained, tending the fire. It is true, it seems, that Shelley's heart would not burn. But—we find in a footnote—the story, dear to romantics, that Shelley's heart was unusually large is a plain lie. In his account of the funeral rites Trelawny said that the heart was "unusually small." Leigh Hunt could not bear to have this known, so he crossed out Trelawny's words and wrote: "It is a curious circumstance that the heart, which was unusually large," seemed proof against the fire. On the way back they stopped at Viareggio, where they got drunk; and driving back to Pisa, in Trelawny's description, they sang, laughed and shouted. "I even felt a gaiety the more shocking, because it was real and a relief." In the following days Byron suffered—from sunburn. His mistress, Teresa, saved a piece of his blistered skin as a memento; it was found among her "relics" when she died.

What is the effect of these details—this unflagging realism—on our preconceptions? I doubt that anyone nowadays thinks of the Romantics as, for instance, Amy Lowell did. We no longer believe in the divinity of poets, and we don't believe in inspiration, and—thank God—we are more than willing to think the worst of everybody. But still, Marchand's biography—so relentless in its piling on of facts, so incontrovertible—is alarming. None of your smirking, Stracheyan innuendoes! Not even delight in telling the truth. Simply the truth. Byron's bad foot; his seduction, while hardly out of his crib, by a female servant; his sodomy; his sleeping with his sister; his whoring; his inability to say no to any woman—the catalogue of his sins is here, and they are more scarlet than even his contemporaries dreamed. And all the while there is Byron, posing, endlessly posing; hinting how wicked he is; daring himself, as it were, to reveal that he has fattered Augusta. . . . What is the effect of this on our preconceptions? We have learned in recent years to admire *Don Juan* (rather than *Childe Harold*). We have read Byron's letters, in which he appears the hard-eyed cynic, the man of action—not at all the rapt author of *Childe Harold*. We have become reconciled to the later Byron; he has seemed, indeed, almost one of us, nearly intelligent enough to be accepted, with Donne, among our friends. And now, Marchand! The effect of this biography is, after all, to make Byron ridiculous.

For was there ever such a case? Perhaps he was irresistible to women. Certainly no woman was irresistible to him. But that is only a part of it—of greater interest to doctors than to readers of poetry. If Byron slept

with his sister and felt compelled to reveal it to that absolute fool, his wife—well, that is Byron's weakness, and since we all make mistakes, we can hardly condemn him.

But when I say that he was ridiculous, I mean ridiculous in the sense that Tartuffe is so—he was not intelligent. He wanted to be bad, a horrible example, like the wicked Lord his grandfather; but he managed only to be an example of the wickedness of vanity. Let us not talk about sexual matters, but about something more important—humanity. To his contemporaries, and to men and women of succeeding generations, it seemed important whether Byron had an incestuous affair, or treated Caroline Lamb as she deserved. It does not seem so to us. But it does seem important that—amply warned of the dangers of such a course—he stuck his daughter away in a convent in Italy, and left her there to die of inadequate care and his own neglect. If he did not kill the child, he certainly made the best possible arrangements to insure that she would be killed. And all the while primping and posing, comparing himself with Napoleon, accusing himself of various flattering misdeemeanours, saying to himself: "After all, I am the enemy of cant!"

And when we go on to the last act, his efforts in the cause of Greek independence—the adventure that, in the eyes of English society and the next generation, made Byron a hero—what do we find? He did nothing. With great pomp, with much vacillation, with many starts and stops—he did nothing. He did not accomplish as much as the Duke of York in folksong—for, as far as can be seen, though he had helmets made and carried a sword, and practised pistol-shooting every day, he never led his men anywhere. Fortunately he died before that could be found out, and his death seemed—at that convenient distance—"the thunder's roll."

Ridiculous. With his eye-rolling, his innumerable affairs, his indefatigable interest in himself—Byron emerges as the very Ancient Pistol of the Romantic period. Then, if we read his poetry with attention, comparing it with the poetry of Keats, Wordsworth, Shelley and Coleridge—it is soon clear that he was the least talented of the lot. A little less and he would rank with Thomas Hood for ingenuity in finding rhymes. *Don Juan*, his masterpiece, is amusing—but placed beside Keats' odes or *The Ancient Mariner*, it disappears. And yet, Byron was far more influential than Keats or Coleridge; even more influential than Wordsworth. Byronism includes a whole genre of literature and behavior. It is the model to which we must refer Gautier's scarlet waistcoat and the lobster of Gérard de Nerval; Romanticism on the Continent would be Byronic. Madame Bovary would be a Byronic heroine; she had all the requirements, physical beauty and stupidity; had she lived, she would have been another Teresa—blowsy, amorous and given to writing her memoirs. Byronism! What was Dylan Thomas if not Byronic; a Byron without money, without the consolation of belonging to an aristocracy. As long as we have poets we shall have Byronism, that sad confusion of life and fantasy—call it Bovarism, if you like—in which the poet comes

to believe that, since poetry is sometimes unreasonable, the less reasonable he himself is, the better poetry he will write. And there will always be an audience for such antics, unless it is diverted by television.

But this is not in Marchand. I have been led afield, as any reader of Marchand is likely to be, from the book to its subject. Marchand himself, while revealing Byron's faults in detail, remains sympathetic to the poet. And this is not difficult, for those who surrounded Byron were—with one exception, Hobhouse—with perhaps another exception, John Murray—as shoddy as he, and without any notable talent. Among the collection of poseurs, adulterers, liars and knaves, Shelley glitters like a star. Hobhouse played Horatio to his Lordship's ignoble Hamlet. Murray, tugged this way and that, divided between his conscience as an editor and his natural obsequiousness, managed to come out of the mess with dignity. As for the rest. . . .

It is evident, in Marchand, that most of the men who knew Byron well—and nearly all the women—loved and admired him, at first. He had, it seems, the charm we find in some drunkards and habitual criminals—he was always admitting his faults, and many were flattered to think that they alone understood him. It is notable, however, that he had few constant friends, and the most constant were those who lived at a distance. At the end, though she never admitted it, he was straining at the leash to get away from Teresa, his last love. It is hard not to be cynical about Byron; he certainly invites cynicism; and my abiding impression of the Greek expedition is that it was a "fleeing from all ports astern" rather than a movement in any clear direction.

VIVIAN MERCIER

Proust, Rivière and Mauriac

THE FOUR BOOKS¹ on French literature which the accidents of publishing have brought before us almost simultaneously in fact bear a close relationship to one another. Jacques Rivière, as the fine tribute in Justin O'Brien's "Introduction" reminds us, was the outstanding editor of that greatest of French periodicals, the monthly *Nouvelle Revue Française*, his tenure of office running from 1919 until his death in 1925. (Professor O'Brien's

¹ MARCEL PROUST ON ART AND LITERATURE 1896-1919, translated by Sylvia Townsend Warner. Greenwich Editions. \$6.00. JACQUES RIVIERE, by Bradford Cook. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 25s. FRANÇOIS MAURIAC, by Michael F. Moloney. Alan Swallow. \$3.75. FROM THE *N.R.F.*, edited with an Introduction by Justin O'Brien. Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. \$5.00.

anthology of non-fiction from the magazine covers only the vintage years from 1919 through 1940; Gide and others launched the *N.R.F.* in 1909, and it has been revived as the *Nouvelle N.R.F.* since World War II, after a Vichyite usurpation of the old title by Pierre Drieu de la Rochelle.) Proust, as almost everybody knows, sent *Swann's Way* to the *N. R. F.* in 1912, only to have it turned down by Gide, of all people. It is not quite so well remembered that Rivière obtained selections from *Within a Budding Grove* for the magazine in 1914, while Gide secured the rights of the whole of *A la Recherche du temps perdu* for the *N.R.F.*'s publishing house during the war years. Thereafter, many passages of the great novel first appeared in the great magazine. The Proust-Rivière *Correspondance* (Paris, 1955) documents the relationship between the friendly but exigent contributor and the admiring, tactful, conscientious editor. Mauriac, who has freely admitted Proust's impact on him, contributed fairly often to the *N.R.F.* He was of course deeply interested in Rivière's hesitant Catholicism, while Rivière in turn thought highly of his novels. Mauriac combined his memories and appreciations of Proust and Rivière into a single book, *Du Côté de chez Proust* (Paris, 1947), a juxtaposition that becomes less strange when we consider that Rivière did more for Proust's early reputation than any other individual, while Mauriac claims that Proust, on the other hand, was for Rivière "the great literary temptation incarnate, flattering his excessive taste for the thing-as-it-is"

Of the four, the new book by Proust is by far the most important. I find its title unnecessarily misleading, however. Even someone who keeps up with current French publications might fail to realize that this is a translation (and a very good one, I suspect) of *Contre Sainte-Beuve, suivi de Nouveaux Mélanges* (Paris, 1954). The title *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, retained for the English version of that particular work, is already misleading enough: although many readers have commented that *A la Recherche du temps perdu* often begins to resemble a series of essays, it is still surprising to find that Proust's critical essay or series of essays against the great nineteenth-century French critic Sainte-Beuve resembles nothing so much as a novel, specifically *A la Recherche*. The young French scholar, Bernard de Fallois, who had already pieced together *Jean Santeuil* from Proust's manuscripts also reconstructed *Contre Sainte-Beuve*.

In his preface to *Jean Santeuil* (Paris, 1952; tr. Gerard Hopkins, New York, 1956) André Maurois made the following acute comment:

Jean Santeuil is an entirely different book from *Remembrance of Things Past*, not only because it is unfinished, but because it lacks the master theme of the later work (the metamorphosis of a weak and nervous child into an artist); the continuity of the leading characters . . . ; the decision to write in the first person, and the courage to plunge into the sulphurous abyss of Sodom.

Two of these elements which were missing from *Jean Santeuil* (abandoned in 1899?) appear in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (1908-9?), namely the first person

singular and the investigation of homosexuality. A further element not mentioned by Maurois, that of involuntary memory, occurs in its full development for the first time, although the mysterious power of memory to confer permanence on the ephemeral and thus to "regain time" had already been hinted in numerous passages of *Jean Santeuil*. The *madeleine* (a rusk, it is called here) soaked in tea, with its magic power to summon up a whole village, appears for the first time in the "Prologue" to *Contre Sainte-Beuve*.

I feel obliged to summarize *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, though I fear any summary is doomed to sound preposterous. And yet all those who are familiar with *A la Recherche* must agree that this miraculously resurrected work is not only the germ but the quintessence of Proust's masterpiece. Beware, however, of using it to give friends or students their first introduction to Proust: those who devour it would have enjoyed *Swann's Way* even more, while those who are Proust-deaf will howl like hyenas.

The "Prologue" begins, "Every day I set less store on intellect," and goes on to give examples of involuntary memory set free without the intervention of the conscious mind: the rusk soaked in tea, the uneven paving-stones, the spoon falling on a plate, and hints of all that these stimuli were to conjure up in the first and last volumes of *A la Recherche*. Then follow evocations of dreams and of awakenings, in strange and familiar bedrooms, on good and bad mornings, which recall countless passages in the later work.

Ultimately one particular morning is evoked, that on which a long-delayed article by Marcel finally appeared in the *Figaro*. We are shown the apartment house where he then lived, one owned and lived in by "the Countess" (a first sketch of Oriane, Duchesse de Guermantes). Marcel's mother characteristically hands him the *Figaro* without telling him the good news and slips out of the room so that he can have the surprise all to himself; just as characteristically, Marcel guesses what she is up to. Later he visits Mama—we must remember that Proust's mother was already dead when this was written, he himself being about 38—while she is dressing, aided by Félicie (a first sketch of Françoise). He plans to discuss his next article with her—one on Sainte-Beuve.

Actually, the indictment of Sainte-Beuve which follows does not take the form of a dialogue, as Proust apparently never got around to re-writing the earlier, more conventional essay before abandoning the work altogether; incomplete, it consists of four parts: "The Method of Sainte-Beuve," "Sainte-Beuve and Baudelaire," "Gérard de Nerval," and "Sainte-Beuve and Balzac." Proust castigates the famous critic for his too cerebral and peripheral approach to his subjects, via biography, social history, history of philosophy, and the like. Sainte-Beuve, he claims, failed to realize that "there is something special about creative writing," to understand that the man and the artist are two totally different "selves," and to grasp intuitively the essential artistic self of a Baudelaire, a Nerval, a Balzac. (Proust stresses Nerval's discovery of involuntary memory in *Sylvie*.) His penetrating essay on Balzac's treatment, or mistreatment, of

fashionable society leads to the astonishing transition marked by the title of the next section, "Monsieur de Guermantes's Balzac." "The Countess's" husband is presumably a better reader of Balzac in his own random, intuitive way than was Sainte-Beuve, for all his celebrated "method."

The next section, "A Race Accursed," concerns M. de Quercy, one of the Guermantes circle and the prototype of M. de Charlus; through him we are introduced to Sodom and Gomorrah and thus to the parallel between homosexuals and that other persecuted people, the Jews.

Next follows "Names," a section in which the romantic aspect of the Guermantes and other ancient families is explored. In "The Return" Marcel explains to Mamma how the sight of Chartres, with its associations of childhood partings from her at the railroad station, made him break off an enjoyable stay at the Chateau de Guermantes and hurry home to her.

Finally comes a section which may not have been intended to form part of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* at all; however, it very clearly anticipates the aesthetic and philosophic theories which bring *A la Recherche* to its triumphant conclusion in *The Past Recaptured*. Here is a characteristic paragraph:

The stuff of our books, the substance of our sentences, should be drawn from our imaginations, not taken just as it comes from real life; but our actual style, and the episodes too, should be made out of *the transparent substance of our best moments, those in which we transcend reality and the present*. [Italics mine].

In evoking his dead mother and all the *temps perdu*, Proust has become, he hopes, a living refutation of Sainte-Beuve's view that the artist is coterminous with, or at most a prolongation of, the man. Proust's theory, certainly, maintains that the artist transcends the man, but his practice, with its tremendous stress on autobiography, seems a vindication of Sainte-Beuve.

In his excellent short book *Jacques Rivière* (New Haven, 1953), Martin Turnell remarks—and Proust would surely have agreed with him—that "French criticism is rich in generalizations about the nature of art, but often provides little assistance in the appreciation of particular authors" Turnell rightly views Rivière's criticism as a notable exception to this rule. Proust's, I now realize, is another, for he can expound with equal felicity—there are numerous examples in *A la Recherche*—the essence of all art, that of a particular author, or that of an individual work. The best single essay—aside from those on Balzac and Baudelaire which form part of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*—in *Marcel Proust on Art and Literature* happens to deal with a painter, Chardin. In it Proust displays his triple felicity and incidentally reminds us that he himself later gained Chardin's power to convey the essences of the most ordinary people and things. I have no space in which to discuss Proust's literary criticism further, but fortunately an admirable book on the subject appeared last year: Walter A. Strauss's *Proust and Literature*, which covers *Contre Sainte-Beuve* and everything else that has been published to date.

Martin Turnell, like Mauriac, has noted in Jacques Rivière a quality that many other writers seem to have overlooked—his pragmatism, which, says Turnell, “is dangerous in religion, but. . . is the essential foundation of literary criticism.” Lacking this quality—and others almost as essential—Professor Bradford Cook has written a weak book on Rivière. Its subtitle, “A Life of the Spirit,” indicates a legitimate emphasis, but does not justify the suppression of the other, anti-spiritual, side of Rivière, which was so prominent in his last years. We need look no farther than page 47 of Justin O’Brien’s anthology for an example of Rivière’s pragmatic philosophy in those years:

All progress of mankind along the path of a certain physical comfort and productivity, at least, if not in the direction of happiness, has always coincided with his lack of interest in final causes.

True, at the beginning of his final chapter Professor Cook asks the right questions, the awkward ones:

What did happen to Rivière after the war? Was he no longer a Catholic? Why? Or, for that matter, had he ever been a Catholic? Why did he turn suddenly to the godless Proust? What happened to his married life?

Unfortunately, he never succeeds in answering these searching, if somewhat naïvely worded, questions. What answers he does appear to give are impenetrably wrapped in ambiguous verbiage. One begins to wonder whether he is naïve, dishonest, or merely the victim of his curious prose style.

Mauriac and Turnell, both Catholics like Professor Cook, offer more forthright testimony; they agree that Rivière “discovered women” late in his life—perhaps the strongest piece of evidence being his posthumous novel *Florence*, which he may have intended as a counterpart to Mauriac’s *Le Fleuve de feu*. (Professor Cook manages not to discuss *Florence* at all.) Mauriac prints a letter of February 16, 1923 (not 1924, as Professor Cook has it), which documents in calm detail Rivière’s spiritual emptiness at that time. If Professor Cook had quoted from this letter at length, he could have dispensed with a great deal of his own verbiage as either unnecessary or invalid. What he does quote from it, however, is so disfigured by cuts as to lose most of its meaning. One of the factors that make Turnell’s book so much better than Cook’s is the readiness of the former to let Rivière speak for himself without interruption, whenever possible.

None of the above evidence invalidates Mauriac’s view that Rivière died as a Christian in 1925, but it does gravely jeopardize Cook’s special pleading in favor of Rivière’s having lived as a Christian during every moment of the years 1919-25.

I am sorry that Professor Cook did not succeed in writing a better study, because Rivière needs to be more widely known than he is in the English-speaking world. However, the other material available in English is first-rate: Turnell’s study; the Mauriac book, *Proust’s Way* (tr. Elsie Pell, New York, 1950); Claudel’s *Letters to a Doubter* (New York, 1927); and the

hostile view to be found in three important passages of Albert J. Guerard's *André Gide* (Cambridge, Mass., 1951).

It was no accident that the *N.R.F.* reached its peak under Rivière's direction, for besides his extraordinary gift of empathy with all the greatest French writers of the period, he is *the* representative French intellectual of the years 1905-25, reflecting with exactitude all the literary, artistic, religious, moral and political preoccupations of that time. In Mauriac's words:

Gide helps him to free himself from Claudel and Péguy; Claudel and Péguy, to free himself from Gide; Proust and Freud draw him far from the other three; and already, by certain signs, I discerned that he was beginning to detach himself from Proust.

Is Mauriac hinting that Rivière was coming under *his* influence (born in 1885, Mauriac was only a year older than the other)? Rivière's letter of February 16, 1923, about *Le Fleuve de feu* could be interpreted to mean just that. We have also a 1924 letter from Rivière to Mauriac in which he says, "Your development as a novelist is the one which interests me most today. . . ."

Is Professor Moloney's the first full-length study of Mauriac's *oeuvre* by an American? I think so. At any rate it is well-written, just, and "pragmatic" in the sense that Professor Moloney has not let his Catholicism narrow his view of Mauriac to the point where he sees only what he wants to see. Nor do we feel with him, as with Professor Cook, that we are watching a limited intelligence astray in the labyrinth of a spacious and complex one. Is it significant that Professor Moloney teaches English, not French? I get the feeling that college language departments nowadays are recruiting technicians rather than people of broad culture. Certainly Professor Moloney gives the impression of having read widely outside his immediate subject-matter.

I have three criticisms to make on his book. First, it is a series of essays rather than a unified work: it needs a general introduction or conclusion to pull it together. Second, it lacks novelty: his judgments are so sound that almost all have been made in English already—in, for instance, the appropriate chapter of Henri Peyre's *The Contemporary French Novel*. (For me, Donat O'Donnell's chapter in *Maria Cross* remains the best study of Mauriac in English.) Third, I think he is unjust to Proust in rating the latter's influence on Mauriac lower than that of Dostoevsky or Balzac; I admit that in *Proust's Way* Mauriac has recently questioned whether Proust's masterpiece after all "marks the triumph of a method," but I do not think this necessarily involves a rejection of the method, for Mauriac begins by saying that twenty years after the death of Proust his admiration for the latter "remains as keen as ever"; rather, I think, he now considers that Proust failed to put his method to the most perfect use; Proust's novel lacks an essential humanity precisely because "God is terribly absent" from it.

Professor O'Brien's *From the N. R.F.* suffers from one basic but inevitable limitation: it includes no creative writing. Any adequate selection from this side of the magazine would run to at least half-a-dozen volumes and include virtually all the important French writers of this century, besides many famous foreigners: for example, translations of parts of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* appeared in its pages.

The volume before us—the first such anthology ever culled from the magazine—consists of critical writing in the broadest sense. Professor O'Brien has divided the material into four groups: general views of the arts and examinations of current trends; studies of particular artists or of individual works; essays on religion and philosophy; political writings.

Except for Proust—who wrote one or two critical articles for the *N.R.F.*—O'Brien has included a high proportion of the French “big names”: Gide, Claudel, Valéry, Mauriac, Malraux, Romain, Montherlant, Bergson, Maritain, Gabriel Marcel, Suarès, Benda, Breton. Other less well-known writers whose reputations are inseparable from the *N.R.F.* receive their share of attention: Rivière, Jean Paulhan (who succeeded Rivière as editor), Schlumberger (one of the founders), Albert Thibaudet, Valéry Larbaud, the painter André Lhote and the philosopher “Alain” (Emile Chartier).

The three writers dealt with in this review are concerned in no fewer than eight of O'Brien's forty-five selections. Four essays on Proust are included from the special memorial issue which appeared in January 1923; I wish that at least one contribution had been selected from the similar Rivière issue of April 1925. Mauriac's one offering is a surprisingly enthusiastic review of a play about Lesbianism, but Jean Prévost's long essay “From Mauriac to His Work” (1930) also appears. Although Rivière contributed to the magazine under all four of O'Brien's headings, I believe, the two essays chosen to represent him both fall into the first section. They are concerned with aesthetic trends, and both advocate Rivière's own version of neoclassicism; this duplication is unfortunate: it would have been better to substitute for one of them a study of an individual author, Proust for example.

Still, O'Brien begins his anthology very appropriately with Rivière's statement of purpose, which headed the first post-war issue in June 1919. I can hardly do better than conclude with two excerpts from it:

In spite of the millions who have died, it is as true today as it was yesterday that a work of art is beautiful for absolutely intrinsic reasons which can be determined only through a direct study of the work, through a sort of hand-to-hand struggle with it. . . .

We shall welcome the claims of the intellect, which today is obviously endeavoring to recover its rights in art: not in order to replace feeling entirely, but to analyse it, to rule over it.

Both Proust and Mauriac could subscribe to these literary ideals; in spite of Dadaism and Surrealism, nearly all that was critically and creatively best in the *N.R.F.* between the wars exemplified Rivière's principles.

DANIEL AARON

Fiction Chronicle¹

MORAVIA'S LAST NOVEL has nothing of the refined sensuality of *The Woman of Rome* or the acrid humor of *Conjugal Love*. Its theme, the resurrection of two women through suffering and humiliation, would seem more appropriate to Silone than to Moravia, who is here dealing with the peasants and a war that grinds away their coatings of custom and habit until their essential character is disclosed. "Man," observes Cesira, the narrator in *Two Women*, "ought to be seen in war and not in peace; not at a time when there are laws and respect for others and the fear of God, but when all these things no longer exist and each man acts according to his own real nature, without restraint and without regard for others."

This robust and tight-fisted peasant, leaving her grocery store when the bombs begin to fall on Rome, must starve and freeze in the adjacent hills, must see her cloistered daughter violated by Moroccan soldiers and toppled into prostitution, must herself (hitherto a ferocious guardian of property) steal the purse of a murdered man before she attains a state of limited grace. Among the peasants with whom she and her daughter, Rosetta, find shelter, her redemption begins as she unconsciously absorbs what at first she regards as the wild opinions of a young intellectual, Michele. He is an anti-clerical saint, disgusted with the slack principles of his property-obsessed father and the bestialized peasants who think only of their own survival and favor any side that will win the war. Michele teaches her to identify her own afflictions with the anonymously miserable in Italy and abroad who have never figured in her considerations. What had been to her the durable things—money, houses, possessions—disappear in the dust and rubble of war, but she emerges from her purgatory chastened by privation and saved by sorrow.

Cesira is an admirable recorder of her dismal history, but her frequent admissions of ignorance and simplicity make her articulateness all the more astonishing. Given her antecedents, her perspicacity is suspect, nor is it likely that she could have related her complicated experiences without the aid of the obliging author. Moravia's usurping will is also too plainly evident in the sudden degeneration of Rosetta and her too abrupt recovery. But if she is more beautiful than believable, the other characters are as pungent as their diet of onions and cheese. *Two Women* could easily have become a maudlin sermon, but Moravia's unblinking recognition of

¹ TWO WOMEN, by *Alberto Moravia*. Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. \$4.95. I'M NOT STILLER, by *Max Frisch*. Abelard-Schuman. \$4.50. THE AFFAIR, by *Hans Koningsberger*. Knopf. \$3.75. THE ITALIAN WIFE, by *Emyr Humphreys*. McGraw-Hill. \$3.75. THE RAINBOW HAS SEVEN COLORS, by *Nadia Legrand*. St. Martin's Press. \$3.75. STRANGERS WHEN WE MEET, by *Evan Hunter*. Simon and Schuster. \$4.50. THE GINGER MAN, by *J. P. Donleavy*. McDowell, Obolensky. \$3.95. PORTRAIT OF A MAN UNKNOWN, by *Nathalie Sarraute*. George Braziller. \$3.50.

the beautiful and the disgusting, the sober and meticulous specificity of his descriptions, and the absolute fidelity with which he presents his storekeepers, peasants, and soldiers make it a harsh but compassionate study of human weakness and resilience.

Anatol Stiller, the self-denying hero of Max Frisch's novel, must, like Cesira, finally accept himself before he can be freed from his literal and metaphysical prison. Picked up by the Swiss police and identified as the missing sculptor and wife-deserter who had fought (not gloriously) in Spain and acquired some dubious Soviet connections, he protests that he is not the fugitive although Stiller's former friends and his beautiful wife are never in doubt about the prisoner's true identity. It is soon apparent that Frisch is not writing a psychoanalytical tale of depersonalization but a Kierkegaardian parable of the bourgeois Jederman in the mid-twentieth century. Stiller's notebooks reveal him as a classic case of the deceiving and self-deceived man whose refusal to accept himself and his rejected past disqualifies him from loving and confines him to the living dead.

Stiller's bleak and lucid comments upon himself, his wife, his counsel, and the public prosecutor simultaneously provide the background of his experiences before and after he made his break, and bring him inexorably to self-recognition. Isolation gives him—as it does Hawthorne's unpardonable sinners—an almost infernal insight into the motives of others. "Oh, this yearning to be white," (he exclaims, as he recalls a Negro girl he had met in America), "this yearning to have straight hair, this lifelong striving to be different from the way one is created." He recaptures his abandoned self and coldly examines its morbid eccentricities, its self-distrust, its panicky fear of rejection. And the glow of his mental searchlight also irradiates his marriage with Julika, the ballet dancer, who (so it seems to him) thrived on his weakness and remained frigid and narcissistic. He maliciously snipes at his smug countrymen, exposes their hypocrisy, mocks at their self-proclaimed freedom and "their fear of being poor, their fear of dying without life insurance" in much the same spirit that Moravia's Michele lashes out at the Italians. But Stiller's mordant diagnoses of his intimates and countrymen (as the public prosecutor observes) are in effect "a precise and exact description" of Stiller's own weaknesses and therefore "a form of coquetry."

The prosecutor (whose wife has been Stiller's lover) is himself emancipated by Stiller's reconciliation with his past, for Stiller's fear of "being misunderstood and misconstrued by his environment" has rubbed off on the others. Only the prosecutor can appreciate Stiller's agonizing progress from the willful yet indecisive exhibitionist, charming, untruthful, dissatisfied, to the man who has emerged "from resigned regret that one is not what one would so much have liked to be" and has accepted "what one is."

I'm Not Stiller (superbly translated by Michael Bullock) provokes the same uncomfortable feeling of identification that Kafka's stories do or Camus' *The Fall*. There is something relentless in the way that Frisch beats down the all-too-human defenses of his hero and universalizes his

habit of giving fine names to disreputable motives, making excessive demands upon himself lest he be forced to take himself as he really is, lying about himself. If modern man shares most of these infirmities, Frisch apparently thinks that only the most determined remove the "invisible *banderillas*" and obtain that hard and unrapturous grace which permits the redeemed to affirm with Stiller: "I feel ready to be nobody but the person as whom I had just been born and to seek no other life than this, which I could not cast from me."

Stiller's refusal to love or be loved and his reflections on crippled marriages and infidelity link Frisch's novel with four recent works—one Dutch, one English, one French, and one American—that also have self-recognition as a theme. Each describes a particular kind of unfaithfulness that is symptomatic of a deeper and not always understood malaise.

The first and best is Hans Koningsberger's *The Affair*, a Stendhalian tale of a love affair that runs its course like a disease. A young Dutch refugee, stranded in a Zurich as complacent and shiny as Frisch's, and waiting for a chance to slip across to England and join the anti-Fascist armies, introduces himself to a Swiss girl at a bazaar. She is an artist, beautiful, upper-class, and rich. What begins as a sexual experiment becomes an intense experience in the agonies and sinuosities of love. Catherine Valois sandwiches Anthoni into her available hours (she "is not a woman who can be wooed" and sees another lover during the weekends) but Anthoni is dissolved by love and cannot maintain the "pleasantly professional" detachment of his mistress. Innocent and introspective, Anthoni worries about his capacities as a lover and speculates on the advantages of brothels. A brothel, he tells himself, is "a bulwark of culture, to clear yourself . . . for thinking, working; to make love happily and instantly and then thank your girl and go out into the air, no pretense, no simulating of new desire, no waiting, no apology, no feeling of guilt for being alone in having it." But as Anthoni's love-making ceases to be a lonely act, and as he becomes wholly enraptured by his partner, he is "utterly unable to be casual and light." By the time Catherine can no longer endure his possessiveness and jealousy, Anthoni has abandoned any thought of getting to England and is ready for suicide.

Koningsberger tells the story almost dryly, careful to keep his undistinguished and small-sized lover unheroic and as much unlike the Shakespearian Anthony as possible. Yet if he calculatingly aims at the un-grand, he can make a telephone call as momentous as the trump of doom and can shock by the very simplicity and candor with which he describes the intimacies of this very intense and miserable love affair.

Emyr Humphrey's novel, though competently put together, sharp, and dramatic, does not produce that illusion of life which makes Koningsberger's slighter and less-cluttered story more memorable. Humphreys seems to be too enamored with his plan, too solicitous of his characters; and his novel is so carefully plotted, the episodes chopped up and arranged so mechanically, that the characters never escape from their assignments. The main character is a famous London publisher of the liberal persuasion,

Richard Roth, a kind of Hearstian Jewish Kingsley Martin. He divides his time between making and unmaking politicians and young women, and humiliates his Italian wife by his perpetual infidelities. Richard's son, Chris, a wholesome and priggish young man, is horrified when he discovers that his stepmother is sick with love for him. She is not much older than he is, but Chris has already promised himself to the daughter of his father's old enemy. Richard, however, believes that Chris has made the advances and sends him off. But after Richard dreams that he has murdered Chris, he belatedly discovers that he has been jealous of his son all along and that he has been trying to perpetuate his own youth. Now, presumably, he will settle down with his still alienated wife. In this inconclusive if well-written novel, Humphreys builds up some powerful scenes, but his characters are potentially more interesting than he succeeds in making them, and his subject is complex enough to deserve a more leisurely treatment than he gives it.

Nadia Legrand plays a different variation on the theme of infidelity, love, and marriage, but she goes at her work more tenaciously and thoroughly than Humphreys does. *The Rainbow Has Seven Colors* presents an ambiguous and protean woman writer through the eyes of seven people. To her maid (1) Florence Sainclair is gentle, fragile, and thoughtful, the victim of malicious gossip; her doctor (2), the brother of her lover's wife, sees her as "strong-minded but muddled," as a woman jolted into momentary creativity by the death of her painter-husband. Geneviève de Brussac (3), a seventeen-year-old incipient Lesbian, turns adoringly to Florence after Madame de Brussac begins to sleep with a brash young man Geneviève has refused to yield herself to. Florence's eleven-year-old daughter (4), sickly and high-strung, is vaguely cognizant of her mother's intimacy with the publisher, Laurent Bertaux. To Bertaux's lymphatic wife (5), Florence is at first an admirable woman and later a bitch, the latter view prompted by a malicious woman author, Anne Mareuil (6), a former mistress of Bertaux and an adroit scandal-monger. The portrait of Florence is finished off by a young English publisher's representative (7) who arrives from London in time to observe how Florence reacts to the news of Madame Bertaux's suicide.

The evanescent Florence remains a mystery, a composite of pride, strength, cruelty, gentleness, and timidity, a woman as incomprehensible to herself as she is to others. "I think," she tells the doctor, "that one arrives at a point where it is essential to find a meaning to life." Or she can observe to the Englishman, "one day or another, we all have to face the conditions of our existence." Neither she, nor anyone else for that matter, ever arrives at that blessed state, and Nadia Legrand does little more than to dramatize two epigrams turned off by the most unpleasant character in the book: "The success of marriage depends upon how well one reacts to disappointment" and "every woman waits for the opportunity to betray her husband."

Strangers When We Meet shows none of the tired Old World wisdom and concentrated attention that European writers bring to a discussion of sex

and infidelity. One of the characters in *I'm Not Stiller* might have been referring to Evan Hunter when she remarked that Americans talk of sex with "premature candour, with the enlightened frankness of eunuchs who don't know what they are talking about." In this novel, Hunter makes no distinction between sex and eroticism, and his commentary on extra-marital adventures is as about as subtle as a meat-cleaver.

Turning from juvenile delinquency (*The Blackboard Jungle*) and dope addiction (*Second Ending*), Hunter has written a "documentary" on Infidelity in what is ostensibly a typical suburban development. Larry, the unfaithful husband, is a young architect apparently adjusted to the routine of early rising, school buses, diapers, and neighborhood parties, and he is sexually satisfied. Children, wife, and public opinion are not strong enough, however, to prevent his seduction by a devastating blonde housewife, and their anatomical love-making continues for several hundred tempestuous pages until the architect (who has really been in love with his wife all the time) turns his car "deliberately toward the edge of the bridge" and dies in the smash. His infidelity has really been a not very well motivated aberration, and Hunter, who has no grasp on the inner life of his intellectually crew-cut hero, is really more interested in cataloguing the hazards of conducting an illicit relationship in a well-run community than he is in speculating on the causes and consequences of infidelity in the American home. Pinecrest, the community in which these un-American activities occur, is vaguely recognizable, but Hunter's insertion of the bold, the unreticent, the frank, his overly casual depiction of bathroom and bedroom play, do little to dissipate the profound unreality that settles over the novel like a fog.

Compared to the architect's menage in Pinecrest with its steamy domesticity, Sebastian Dangerfield's Dublin dwelling is a sewer. He is the scurriulous deadbeat and masher who cheats and fornicates his way through J. P. Donleavy's first novel, *The Ginger Man*, but his infidelities provoke no qualms of conscience. Home for Sebastian, an erstwhile Trinity scholar from America, stands for his complaining English wife, whom he alternately punches and deceives, his daughter's dirty bottom, greasy dishes, and leaking toilets. To escape household tensions, this untypical expatriate takes up successively with a number of utility wives, each of whom supplies him with what the others lack. After his wife leaves him, Sebastian consoles himself with Miss Frost, the lodger. He has bilked his landlord of one house and the landladies of another, cadged money and drinks from his friends, and rolled up huge accounts in the grocery stores whose proprietors he has impressed by his accent and air. Finally, Sebastian keeps a rowdy assignation with a large-bosomed Dublin girl (Donleavy's *ewige Weibliche*) in London and is poised for further adventure when the novel musically closes.

Dangerfield's credo ("Keep one's eyes wide open and never know when or what might come up. Live off the environment.") and his brutal assault on all of the middle-class verities link him with the "angry young men" of the English school, but he is not of the same breed. He and his creator

are Americans. There is a fantastic strain in his actions and reflections more reminiscent of the frontier "tall-tale" picaros than of Amis and Osborne. Sebastian, the imposter who is finally reduced "to accent," lives outside the precincts of social life through which prowl the Lucky Jim's of England. He is a modern cousin of Sutt Lovingood, the savage whoremaster and practical joker of George Washington Harris. Although the Brooklyn-born John Patrick Donleavy makes Sebastian speak in a Joycean lingo and spatters his talk with Irish and English vernacular, his language is an invented one and designed especially for the monstrous world in which Sebastian lives.

In his perceptive introduction to *The Ginger Man*, Arland Ussher sees Sebastian as "the eternal essential Male . . . a figure of our present disorder, of America at odds in the Old World." What distinguishes him from Henry Miller's scabrous down-and-outers and the peregrinating hipsters of San Francisco is his disdainful rage, his scorn of self-pity, and his unsentimental celebration of the appetites. Sebastian can accept himself. His sordid adventures, his gusts of meanness, his knavish perversities are tinged by his comic vision of life.

In *The Ginger Man*, as well as in *Two Women* and *I'm Not Stiller*, the majority are perceived as embedded in materiality like insects in amber. Things distract minds and prevent self-illumination; convention, custom, and public opinion conceal spiritual nakedness. Yet sometimes, as Jean-Paul Sartre writes in his introduction to Nathalie Sarraute's *Portrait of a Man Unknown*, the "commonplaces break down and a frightful protoplasmic nudity becomes apparent." Her novel is a most extraordinary revelation of those moments when things no longer interpose themselves between consciousness and Reality, when the facade of the universe cracks, and the soul palpitates in uterine darkness.

Nathalie Sarraute's narrator is a neuropath obsessed by a father and daughter whom he spies upon with the gloating pertinacity of Henry James's key-hole peeper in *The Sacred Fount*. He watches them and eavesdrops, but even when they are presumably beyond sight and sound, he divulges their thoughts and seems to be privy to forgotten episodes in their past. The father in his public aspect is the rough, jolly eccentric, given to joshing young girls, sounding off on politics, and playing up to his cronies who flatter him and take his side against his extravagant daughter. In her public role, this mousy and dowdy spinster is supported by a battery of old "witches" who encourage her to protest against her unfatherly father's stinginess. But the narrator, hypersensitive to the dividing line between the "inauthentic" world of appearances and the concealed but "authentic" Reality (the terms are Sartre's), sees their true relationship as an almost voluptuous symbiosis. Each relishes the consequences of the bitter quarrels that suck them down into a subterranean nightmare world where only the narrator can follow them. This psychic coupling only ends when the daughter becomes engaged to a stolid materialist whose very corporeality prevents the trio from ever slipping again into authentic existence. They take on the petrified "slightly lifeless look" of the living dead.

Although *Portrait of a Man Unknown* has little plot in the conventional sense (it is filled with trips to museums, meetings in restaurants, unexciting excursions), it vibrates with an intensity that is hard to explain. Perhaps the suspense is partly in the slow and terrifying emergence of the father, daughter, and narrator in their masked and unmasked states, and in the uncanny presentation of "they" (what Emerson would call the "non-me"). The Real is "a formless, strange, threatening universe" into which a sensitive minority inadvertently drop, but "they" are like ants

. . . working tirelessly in an effort to rebuild an ant-hill that is crumbling on every side, like women who are continually refreshing their delicate make-up, they scurry about, filling in holes, adding new plaster . . . like varnish the construction that surrounds them is constantly cracking and peeling . . . and through the tiny fissure, an undefinable threat, something relentless and intolerable that exists on the other side, always ready to worm its way in, keeps seeping through, stealthily. . . . Under its pressure the peeling and abrasion grow inordinately; it advances upon them, filling their entire field of vision the way closeups cover the whole screen in a film. And all their contained anguish, suddenly liberated, aroused as by a draught of air, swells and tautens towards this abyss . . .

Nathalie Sarraute evokes this viscous world through astonishing metaphors, invariably apt, and piercing the reader (to quote her out of context) "the way the silken edge of certain sharp grasses cut insidiously into the flesh." She is detached and hovering, peering at her characters with the same fascination and distaste that she engenders in her readers. She gropes for the hidden, transforms the landscape of actuality into a frozen lunar waste, and makes the impalpable and the invisible disturbingly alive.

GERALD WEALES

Farce, and Anouilh

THERE IS A KIND OF serious commercial play—*The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* is the best recent example—that goes carefully and bromidically about its business of explaining its characters and its action. Such a play clings desperately to current ideas of human motivation—at the moment psychological; at other times economic, social. It gains a reputation for forthrightness by saying on stage what is constantly being said by amateur experts over coffee cups. Its preoccupation with scientifically exact delineation becomes, however, the juggling of clichés. It sacrifices character and action to correctness. Such a talking textbook, if sufficiently animated by direction and performance, gains a brief acclaim (has anyone read Galsworthy lately?), but even at the moment of success (certainly in Inge's case) there are those in the audience who long for less pretentious dramatic forms. If we are not to have a theater of ideas, let us at least have action. If we are not to have a stageful of characters, let us at least have lively stage stereotypes. Melodrama and farce, which are sometimes treated like poor relations of tragedy and comedy, become suddenly welcome guests. The impulse to escape the Ingés of the theatrical world may have been behind last season's unsuccessful off-Broadway revival of *The Girl of the Golden West*, but the Belasco play was an unfortunate choice since one scene (the one in which the blood drips on the sheriff's hand) does not make a melodrama. Such an impulse is explicitly behind the recent volume of French farces that Eric Bentley has edited for Mermaid Dramabooks.¹

Bentley introduces the volume with an essay, "The Psychology of Farce," in which he has two purposes. He intends to free the word *farce* from slavery to drama critics who use it to describe any excess that they happen not to like, and he hopes to offer the beginnings of a workable definition of the genre. He easily extricates *farce* from the pejorative prison in which it has been placed. His attempted definition is less successful, for three reasons. First, it is admittedly tentative. Second, the psychological approach is more useful in explaining the reaction to farce than it is in defining the genre. Third, the six plays in this volume—by Labiche, Sardou, Courteline, Feydeau and Prévert—lead him quite naturally to discuss farce in relation to sex and marriage, a relationship that is extremely apt in this volume, but is less useful in relation to, say, Pinero's *Dandy Dick* or Joseph Kesselring's *Arsenic and Old Lace*, both of which are good farces.

I am not particularly attracted to psychological terminology, but I can find little fault with the idea behind the editor's statement, "Like dreams, farces show the disguised fulfillment of repressed wishes." There are, however, as Strindberg said of crimes, dreams and dreams. Bentley focuses

¹ LET'S GET A DIVORCE AND OTHER PLAYS, edited by Eric Bentley. Hill and Wang. Paper, \$1.75; cloth, \$3.95.

almost entirely on the dreams of violence, of escape from routine through explosion. Yet man is not only a rebel in his dreams; he is also a hero. The plot of the farce, the "symbol" in Bentley's discussion, can make man not only a destroyer (of convention in the French marriage farces and of men in American murder farces like *Arsenic and Old Lace*), but it can make him the unbeatable winner (in the sports farces from *Dandy Dick* to *Three Men on a Horse*). Even if we extend the kind of dream with which farce is implicitly involved, as I am sure that Bentley would want us to (he discusses Chaplin, who is both destroyer and hero), "The Psychology of Farce" tells us more about the audience than about the theatrical form.

The attempt to get precision into the definition of literary and theatrical genres is a thankless one. Tragedy and comedy are terms that are so elastic that they can be stretched to cover plays that are amazingly dissimilar. So are the words melodrama and farce. Some aid in a definition of the latter terms can be found in Bentley's discussion of the way farce should be acted: "the dynamic of farce proper derives from the interplay between the mask (of actuality) and the real face (of primitive instinct)." This interplay, it seems to me, must never allow the real face to show in farce or melodrama. The face must be there implicitly (the dream to which the audience reacts and in which it shares), but the mask is the material of these two genres. If an attempt is made to go beneath the mask, farce becomes comedy or bad farce; melodrama becomes serious drama, perhaps even tragedy, or bad melodrama. Farce and melodrama are primarily vehicles of action performed by characters who are one-dimensional. A successful farce or melodrama is that play in which the action is so funny or so absorbing that the audience is not given time to ask questions. When one asks, in Clyde Fitch's *The City*, how in the world George Rand could have run a crooked business without knowing it, the play fails as melodrama; since no answer to the question is given, it also fails as social drama. When one asks—as so often happens with recent Broadway attempts at farce (Sam Locke's *Fair Game* is a ghastly example)—*why bother?* the farce fails.

An attempt as hesitant as this one-paragraph gesture toward definition cannot draw lines that would safely divide farce from fantasy, from character comedy, from humor comedy, from romantic comedy, even from sentimental comedy. The types overlap. It is only useful in that it stresses action over motivation. If it does not define *farce* precisely, it at least points to an area of theatrical activity which gives some real meaning to the word *farcical*. Since the plot is primary in farce, as Bentley says, since action is the real material of farce, certain elements are necessary to the form: surprise, improbability, complication, speed, absurdity. These are hardly the exclusive property of farce. They are likely to appear in any play and, if we have accepted that a farce is a mixture of these elements, seasoned with the appearance of hyper-normality (Groucho Marx saying conversationally to Margaret Dumont, "I hear they're going to tear you down and put up a filling station"), then we can recognize elements as farcical whether or not the play is a farce. When Peter draws his sword and

chases the young Covey around the Clitheroe parlor in *The Plough and the Stars*, the action is farcical even though O'Casey's play is not a farce. *Farcical*, then, like *farce*, is a respectable descriptive word and not a nasty label.

Bentley's essay is chiefly valuable because it successfully reaffirms that farce is one of the ancient and honorable theatrical genres; the plays he has collected second his motion. His essay, as definition, is rich with the kind of suggestion that sends the reader down his own path of contemplation on the nature of farce, but that it does not—that it cannot—give concrete definition to the form is apparent in the plays themselves. Useful definitions, as Aristotle knew, are finally made by the examination of specific works. The six plays in this volume, although they have family resemblances, are quite different. Georges Feydeau's *Occupe-toi d'Amélie* (here, *Keep an Eye on Amélie*!) comes closest to Bentley's description of farce. It makes a shambles of marriage both in the attitude of the characters toward the institution and in the incredible marriage ceremony that fills one whole scene. The two plays by Eugène Labiche are gentler. *Le Voyage de Monsieur Perrichon* (here, *A Trip Abroad*) capitalizes on the gaucheries and the self-importance of its leading character; *Célimare le bien-aimé* (here, just *Célimare*) is built on the attempts of a reformed rake to shake off the friendly husbands of his former mistresses so that he can enjoy life with his new young bride. Victorien Sardou's almost prim *Divorçons* (here, *Let's Get a Divorce*!) is an extension of the idea that the illicit is always the attractive, and its primary joke is the familiar French one (Henri Becque's *La Parisienne*; Jean Anouilh's *Ardèle*) that the lover can be more husbandly jealous than the actual husband. Georges Courteline's *Les Boulingrin* (here Americanized as *These Cornfields*) is the most interesting play in the volume. It is a short display of slapstick diabolism that is as relentless as the Marx Brothers or Laurel and Hardy (at least, in *Two Tars*) and as implacable in its view of marriage as the early W. C. Fields comedies; it makes Ionesco's newly discovered tragic farce seem tame and timid. These five plays cover the period from 1860 to 1908, from Labiche to Feydeau, and they give an attractive picture of successful French farce in what Bentley calls "the heyday of modern farce." The Jacques Prévert *La famille tuyau de poêle, ou Une famille bien unie* (here, *A United Family*) does not belong in this volume. It is a sardonic sketch, built around a family that is held together by incest and perversion. It is more talk than action, the product of a later period when the best farce had already passed from the stage to the screen. It is good to have the Prévert play in English, but it is not quite at home in this company.

This small volume is valuable for a number of reasons. It makes easily available a group of representative French farces, all of which are funny. It treats farce, as it should be treated, as a respectable dramatic form. Incidentally, it reminds us that, although a good farce can be read with pleasure, the farce—more than any other kind of play—is more theatrical than literary. There are many scenes in these plays—particularly in Feydeau's *Amélie*—that are almost completely visual, that demand the

actor, the stage business, the properties for their comic effects. Since these are good farces, they are often full of verbal ingenuity, but, for the same reason, they contain the scaffolding for physical ingenuity. Although the collection helps save the farce from being dismissed *simply* as a theater piece, it provides ample evidence that the farce remains *primarily* a theater piece.

The excuse for passing from a discussion of farce to an examination of Jean Anouilh is that Mermaid Dramabooks has issued a volume of the French playwright's plays² at the same time that it has published its collection of farces. The transition has a logic, however, that is almost as strong as the accidents of the publishing business. Not that Anouilh writes farces. Yet all his plays—from the fluffy fairy tales like *Léocadia*³ to the more somber plays included in the Dramabook—use the materials of farce discussed in the paragraphs above. Peter Brook, who directed *Ring Round the Moon*, Christopher Fry's adaptation of *L'Invitation au Château*, attempted to define the quality of Anouilh's work in a preface to the published edition of that play: "He is a poet, but not a poet of words; he is a poet of words-acted, of scenes-set, of players-performing." Brook's words (words-juggled) are lightly tinged with the English fondness for the aesthetic-mystical, but they do indicate the relationship between Anouilh and farce (or melodrama). His plays seem at first glance to be preoccupied with the mask, the surface of actuality; but the preoccupation, on closer examination, is discovered to be not that of the farceur but of his characters. The farce is an invention that puts the semblance of people through swift and absurd action in the hope that the audience will sense but not know the reality that lies beneath the surface. Anouilh's plays are inventions in which his characters, pretending to be mere semblances, put themselves through swift and absurd actions in the hope that they and their fellow characters will escape the reality that lies beneath the surface; Anouilh's strength as a playwright is that he continually uncovers what his characters try to hide.

There are two ways in which Anouilh's characters can escape the reality that plagues them. The most delightful way, the way of *Léocadia* and *L'Invitation au Château*, is for them, with the connivance of the author, to take part in a fantasy in which the prince always gets the beggar girl, in which as Capulat says in *L'Invitation*, "Love can still be stronger than social barriers, careless of scandal, as pure as death. There can still be the desperate plot, the impersonation . . ." The second way, the way of *Antigone*, *Eurydice* and *Romeo and Jeannette*, is through the voluntary acceptance of death as the ally of the innocent moment, the pure emotion. The second way is the other side of the first; both are fairy tales. One escapes corruption by building a fantasy world in which it does not exist or by leaving the actual world before it has time to set in. The Sleeping Beauty is Isolde's sister.

² JEAN ANOUILH (no editor given). Hill and Wang. Paper, \$1.75; cloth, \$3.95.

³ Just published as *TIME REMEMBERED*, by *Jean Anouilh*, English version by *Patricia Moyes*. Coward-McCann. \$2.95.

The five plays that make up the new Anouilh volume—*Antigone* less than the others—are mainly concerned, as Anouilh almost always is, with the aspects of love. The assumption behind all the plays is that there is a moment in which love is strong and perfect and that life, by definition, will assault the purity of that moment with the little preoccupations of men, that love will inevitably give way to fear, distrust, jealousy, boredom. To escape the gradual disintegration, to keep from descending to the status of mere husbands and wives, or mere lovers, Orpheus, after an intimation of greatness (ironically in a French provincial railway station) with his Eurydice, agrees to join her in death; Frederic and Jeannette, in *Romeo and Jeannette*, stand embracing on a beach while the waves come in to drown them. There is, however, another side to the story of the dying lovers. In each play there is a character or a group of characters—Orpheus' father, Eurydice's mother, Jeannette's father—who prefer compromise, who insist on the little consolations of life. In these two plays, life's advocates are pale, weak and foolish compared to the lovers. In *Antigone*, however, where the reason for her death but not her reasoning is different, Creon is an eloquent pleader for the anti-heroic. For Antigone, the alternative to death is the possibility of a long and placid life with Haemon, a life of small pleasures and small pains, of quiet problems and undramatic solutions, and she chooses the one act of heroism, which may or may not be the grand illusion. *Antigone* is a stronger play than any in the book, partly because the heroine is so obviously attracted to Creon's reasoning; she admits that her insistence on death is absurd, but her death (and to a lesser extent those of the lovers in the other two plays) are a declaration that the supposedly absurd, the conventionally irrational act is the only act of heroism in a world that has beguiled itself with the appearance of rationality.

The other two plays in the five-play collection deal also with the growth and decay of love. *The Ermine*, an early Anouilh play, is an attempt to make the murder of an elderly and domineering duchess the act that assures the validity of love in a doubtful world; the play, however, is an attempt at philosophical melodrama in which the melodrama is stifled by the philosophy and the ideas are beat to death as surely as the duchess is. *The Rehearsal* (*La Répétition, ou L'Amour Puni*) is a much more interesting play. When a pleasure-loving Count falls in love with a young governess, his wife, his mistress and his alcoholic friend conspire to destroy his new discovery, because they cannot bear to see him treat love as anything but a game. The plot is played out against the rehearsals for a comedy in which each of the principals plays a part that corresponds to the one that he plays in relation to the love of the Count and Lucile. In these plays, then, as in the other three, love is depicted as a quality which must necessarily be dirtied if it is allowed to roam free in the world.

Except for *The Ermine*, which—part of the first act aside—is tedious, the plays in the volume are good ones. They are not, however, the best of Anouilh. *Romeo and Jeannette* has whole sections, surprisingly the love scenes, in which the mind of the reader is likely to wander elsewhere; *The*

Rehearsal is reminiscent of too many other, earlier Anouilh plays, not in theme which would be understandable, but in the incidentals: a jealous lover like the one in *Ardèle*, speeches on the hard work of leisure like those in *Léocadia*. *Antigone* and *Eurydice*, perhaps because they have gone to the classics for plots on which to play variations, are the best of the lot. The real trouble, in all except *Antigone*, is a terrible explicitness, long scenes which have almost as much explanation and self-analysis as *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*. In *Antigone*, the heroine and Creon explain at length, too, but their explanations are quite evidently the hesitant attempts of the two characters to feel their way toward positions on which they can stand. This is the kind of thing that makes Anouilh's best plays, his ironic comedies like *The Waltz of the Toreadors* and *Ardèle*, so fine. Frantz in *The Ermine* cries out against his friend, "Through the expression of amazement on your face, I can read in it the signs of your manhood. Signs of indulgence and irony . . ." The characters in Anouilh's ironic comedies, particularly General St. Pé, have reached that state which the lovers in the somber plays want so much to avoid. The general still has the hope that Antigone no longer wants and he knows, like Vincent in *Eurydice*, that "on this earth . . . all our hopes are shattered . . ." He is a comic character, aware that he is taking part in a self-defined farce, but his ability to suffer and to pretend makes him much more fascinating than the adolescents who disappear in one flaming moment of ecstasy in the plays in this volume. *The Waltz of the Toreadors* is a much more solid play—in its way a much more serious play—than any of the five dark plays in the Drama-book. Only *The Rehearsal* approaches it in understanding; only *Antigone* approaches it in quality.

Although other plays might make more valuable a Jean Anouilh addition to the Mermaid series, the five plays here are certainly worth collecting. Better editing would have made the collection more useful. What the volume lacks is notes like those that Bentley has appended to his collection of farces and to his Modern Theatre series that Anchor published—factual material on the writing, publication and production of the plays. It would be useful to know that four of the plays were published in Anouilh's *Pièces Noires* and *Nouvelles Pièces Noires*, for that knowledge tells us something of the way Anouilh views his own plays. If the original dates of the plays were given, *The Ermine* might seem less out of place; thematically it belongs in the collection, qualitatively it does not, and it is comforting to know that it was written in 1931, ten years before any of the other plays with which it lies in forced comparison. Details of English and American production—for instance that *Romeo and Jeanette* was done in England as *Fading Mansions*—might help to smooth away the ambiguities that surround the identity of Anouilh's plays for the American audience, for so many of them seem to have turned up under such a variety of names. A few pages of notes could not markedly have increased the cost of *Jean Anouilh* and they would certainly have enhanced the value of the volume.

BENJAMIN DE MOTT

A Troublemaker

“YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY have lost the courage to fail and are too ready to settle for a half success.” Where is the proper home for this sentence? *Time*? A Rotary speech? A TV documentary about dope pushers? Spock’s column in the *Ladies’ Journal*? Encountered in any of these places, where the question of belief or disbelief rarely arises, such a sentence causes no concern; in the first paragraphs of what was expected to be a sophisticated literary discourse the sentence is painful. How did that get in? the reader asks impatiently. Why drag youth into this? The questions return more than once in a reading of Prof. Chase’s new book,¹ and there are other irritations—some of them the kind usually regarded as symptoms of general dullness. But, surprising to say, that way of regarding them won’t quite do in the case of *The Democratic Vista*: the book, which is organized as a series of dialogues, takes time out from its youthbaiting to engage some real opposition, and in doing so it achieves a fine young springy life of its own.

Something less than this would have seemed likely, it ought to be said, even if Prof. Chase had not begun by hounding the young. His publishers promote the book by excerpting jazzy paragraphs where the words Elvis Presley occur, thereby intimating that it is another piece of popculturism. And Prof. Chase for his part loads his opening pages with compliments to nature and heavy wisecracks, and allows his speakers (“representative” intellectuals brought together at summer’s end at a house on the North Shore of Massachusetts) to feel each other out with gabble about academic salaries, the midnight naked swim, and the new American Dad. The use of many voices was supposed to provide opportunities for The Other Side to be heard, and the clowning is probably only the product of a fear of dullness; but from the very beginning both obscure the purpose, and the fundamental earnestness, of the enterprise.

The purpose, put in blunt unpromising terms, is to say what is bad about middlebrow culture. Toward this end, Prof. Chase (speaking through the key character of his dialogues, Ralph Headstrong) begins by rehearsing in detail the case for a middle culture that Van Wyck Brooks put forward forty years ago in *America’s Coming of Age*. Headstrong recalls Brooks’ claim that what America needed was a middle mode of imagining and thinking that would reconcile the contrarities of the national character and produce an “open, skeptical, sympathetic” art expressive of the whole life of the people. A stimulating notion, says Headstrong, but unsound. The values of the middle culture are solidly anti-intellectual and therefore cannot be trusted by the artist or the thinker. Equally to the point, these values have not been trusted in the past; our genius, literary

¹ THE DEMOCRATIC VISTA, by *Richard Chase* Doubleday. \$3.95

and other, has always been better disposed toward contradiction and disruption than toward unity, has preferred to harden and sharpen the lines of intellectual conflict rather than to blur them in some “sensible” moral compromise.

Observations of this kind lead straight to the subject, Alienation, and are the staple of symposiums, lectures, and leading articles; everyone who has had to listen to them or read them knows how the line of argument develops—and knows too that he had better not expect it to be dressed out with examples. There is, to be sure, no lack of material from which to choose examples. The deeds and acts of foundation executives, *kitsch* publishers, college administrators, language lab men, and book club tycoons supply a good deal, as do those of all the other canting, confused (and well-heeled) managers of middlebrow culture—Image Builders in the public relations offices of the universities, trustees who find new uses for chairs hitherto reserved for the genuinely learned, professionals who abandon serious scholarship in favor of mass market literary gossip, and amateurs who opportunistically oversell recent literature, especially American literature (“recent” meaning writers lately deceased or otherwise past their prime as of this moment), as a way of connecting the popular mind with the bursar. What is more, a careful examination of this sort of material is obviously essential to any decent account of the pattern of displacement of respectable intellectual standards. But the examination is, as one might say, impracticable; it cannot be conducted without treading on great toes, and since, with things as they are, that activity could only lead to a reputation for envy and negativism, no one seriously expects it to be undertaken.²

The pleasure, and here and there the excitement, of *The Democratic Vista* is that facing this difficult situation, it does not simply shout the word Alienation and leave the room. The book names few names in explaining why the style of the well-meaning, well-educated American is flaccid and credulous instead of skeptical. People will still have to rely on the underground bulletins of friends for exact data on the rate at which mass tastes, consent engineering, social responsibility, and celebrity worshipping are moving into American academies, “organs of critical opinion,” and other formal intellectual enterprises. But the book does speak out at some length on these subjects and ultimately arrives at a potency of bitterness that is its own example—a better one by far than could have been expected.

Consider the treatment of education. When a university professor talks about the horrors of the educational system, he usually has in mind educa-

² About a year ago Geoffrey Wagner complained in *The American Scholar* about the confusion of standards apparent among reviewers for *The Times Book Review*. His piece was temperate in tone, and went out of its way to distribute praise. (It even ventured to compliment *Time* for its handling of new writers—a sensible and long overdue gesture to some anonymous if well-paid intelligence.) Whoever answered the complaint took the line that Wagner was bitter because he could not “get into” the magazine.

tionists, methods courses, students who can't spell *muscle*, and so on. Chase, on the contrary, has in mind the university itself:

What I . . . deplore is the effect the new worldliness is having on education. The value of the university depends on its being different from the rest of society, since its function of gaining, organizing, and interpreting knowledge about the world cannot be accomplished without preserving a measure of detachment. Yet the tendency nowadays, abetted by the foundations, is to embark upon a program of social responsibility by stamping out of the university the special characteristics that make it what it is. The unusually gifted or high-spirited student must surely be chagrined to find that the modern American university is not so much a place where he can make exciting discoveries and engage in scholarship, higher education, athletics, and sowing his wild oats, as a drab and joyless training ground or sub-bureaucracy for turning out competent non-entities. In the under-graduate college of my own university [the reader must remember that it is Ralph Headstrong who is speaking here], where for two centuries the ideal has been *mens sana in corpore sano* or the well-rounded man, the new ideal is the 'Citizen.' All over the country, universities and colleges, traditionally supposed to be *by definition* the home of the arts, as well as of the sciences, are building well-endowed Arts Centers. Partly because it is Broadway, Hollywood, and TV money that endows these centers and partly because of the lack of decision and purpose of those who run them, they become merely vocational training schools for conventional middlebrow art and the mass media. Accommodation to the times and the ever-widening sense of the university's responsibility to society are fine—so long as these are not just high-sounding phrases meaning 'suicide.' For surely in the long run the academy will have nothing to offer the world if it fails to assert, against the many hostile forces that surround it, an intransigent distinctiveness.

If the eye is unsteady here, the heart is sound, and the passage does not stand alone. The dilution of university life is seen as one among many symptoms of the way in which "forms of expression and feeling above the level of mass media [are] being boiled down into a sort of middlebrow mush," and as he identifies the symptoms Chase's spokesman flails a lovely partisan cudgel. Commenting on what is called The Religious Revival he observes that the language of sermons is still "indistinguishable from that of a public relations man for a cement company." He says, apropos of sex education, that "they have freed sex of the old melodrama and substituted a comedy of bourgeois sentiment or a soap opera." Confronting the vogue of Wisdom manifested in the writing of certain literary critics who once cared about the distinctions between writers' voices, Headstrong claims that he doesn't know "why people like wisdom so much; it is a soggy, gloomy, cryptic, moralistic habit of mind." Rejecting the deloused Whitman who appears in criticism from time to time, Headstrong asserts that: "Whitman is not an enormous middlebrow cabbage. He

does not dissolve and reconcile in his succulent emotional juices the contradictions of his culture. When he makes sense as a poet or a social critic he does so exactly by his ability to objectify and illustrate those very contradictions." And, hunting a more recent ally, Headstrong settles on Randolph Bourne, and quotes the latter's fortifying recommendation of the thorough malcontent who is filled up with "irritations at things as they are, disgust at the continual frustrations and aridities of American life, deep dissatisfaction with self and with the groups that give themselves forth as hopeful."

Plainly there is bombast and flashiness in all this. And it could be said that the choice of symptoms like the vogues of Toynbee, Edmund Burke, myth criticism, and psychoanalysis betokens small originality, and that more precision of speech, and less jargon, would have done no harm. (Headstrong's case against sociological and psychological studies opens with the following sensible assertion: "It has become the custom to ask, not 'Is this or that idea right or wrong?' but 'What will happen to me, what will it reveal about me, where will it place me, if I profess it?' " And then lapses straightway into awkwardness: "We have saturated and obscured ideas with psychiatric and sociological symbolisms.") But the task undertaken is a dirty one: that needs to be remembered. Prof. Chase is not offering "a reading" of *The Sacred Fount*, he is attempting to define species of phoniness and vulgarity that taken together have an extraordinarily dispiriting effect. To complain of his inelegance, his looseness, his too ready acceptance of the depressing vocabulary of his enemy—conformity, otherdirected, low-middle-highbrow, and the like—is to imply that books like *The Democratic Vista* are appearing every day, and that could not be less true.

The youthbaiting, though—to put an abrupt end to praise—is a bad thing: it dulls the edge of the scorn. As has been indicated, it is not a constant theme; *The Democratic Vista* is sometimes sound in its account of the processes of history that made it inevitable for middlebrow culture to develop (like lowbrow culture) as the production and consumption of brand names and of various postures of neutrality. But now and then Ralph Headstrong seems to argue that the history in question may not cover much more than a decade or two. Why so? Because in a sense the acceptance of the middle culture is (as he sees it) a consequence of the timorousness and complacency of the young—the pitiable folk who, in the language quoted at the head of this review, "have lost the courage to fail." All the speakers in Chase's dialogues represent generations; next to Headstrong the most voluble of them is George Middleby, a graduate student of literature who is to be taken as a "typical" intellectual of the younger generation. Those familiar with the type—it probably has no equal for acerbity and cynicism—will be surprised at what Chase makes of it. Middleby shows few traces of astringency, blends in his voice the accents of Ike, Gilbert Highet, and DeWitt Wallace, and is likely to remind older teachers strongly of the last not-bright but extremely *interested* former student they agreed to recommend to someone as a promising

assistant dean.³ The purpose of the libelous characterization is obvious: if the reader believes this *is* the voice of the younger generation, if he believes, say, that a young university intellectual would assert in a grave voice that the rise of book and record clubs is evidence of an intensification of American cultural life, then clearly he will be receptive to the suggestion that the coarsening and debasing of culture is a result of an unnamed virus that began poisoning the baby crop shortly after 1920.

The limits of such an analysis—to call it that, instead of a mere deviation from good sense—are clear enough. The point of considering them even for a minute is that the deviation illustrates how an honorable old instinct—that for nostalgia—can lure the most determined intelligence away from openness and skepticism into provincialism and young-fogeyism. Ralph Headstrong's nostalgia rather does lead him in these directions. Having met a dull fellow and described him as *The Young Man of Our Day*, Headstrong goes on to ruminate about the differences between "my" generation of intellectuals and "your" generation. And before he is finished, he has excited himself into "calling for" young men who will live dangerously and fight the forts of folly as "we" did when we were young, and into declaring, all profundum, that the country will never again produce writers like those who flourished in his day. From this emphasis on units of time too small to matter that much (Headstrong is in his early forties) the step is short to a narrowing of taste. The step is never quite baldly taken in *The Democratic Vista*, but in a work arguing the case for contrarieties, oppositions, and novelties, it is embarrassing to find a list of good writers of the forties ("writers like Saul Bellow, Randall Jarrell, Robert Lowell, Ralph Ellison, Alfred Kazin, Isaac Rosenfeld, Mary McCarthy, Leslie Fiedler") that seems like a Club Membership roster.

Of course to register hostility to mistakes and oversimplifications like those mentioned is one matter, to say why they deserve to be called that is another. Nobody can *prove* that skepticism is the proper response to the claim that Prof. Chase's generation was heroic. The generation in question graduated from college in the thirties; Prof. Chase's autobiographical notes on the period run as follows: "1933-1937 Dartmouth College. Associated with college radicals. Felt *with* them but was not officially in the movement. Thought them 'interesting' and emotionally vital and free. Still thinks they were, at least the less fanatical ones . . . RC thought them deluded, made up his mind one summer day in 1936 after reading an article in *Atlantic Monthly* by William Henry Chamberlain, that Russian Bolshevism was an inhuman tyranny." Was it daring to feel *with* a cell of undergraduate Reds? The very young (in-betweeners as well) are so badly cut off from the experience that they know little about the chimes heard on these teen-age midnights except that the bellringers have managed to stay out of stir since reaching their majority. It is true that on occasion harsh

³ At least this character is fictional, though; by using his imagination rather than his social acquaintance, Prof. Chase spared some young, able, real-life character the humiliation of being *appointed* spokesman for the younger generation. Mr. Norman Podhoretz comes to mind as the latest to suffer in this fleece-lined hairshirt.

remarks are heard about the young teachers of the middle or late thirties who lined up on *The Right Side* at the great universities, doing battle for social revolution, American Literature, and the Critical as opposed to Historical thesis. Some contemporaries of these leaders assert—in bitterness? in simple envy?—that the free spirits ceased to be free spirits at the moment politics went out; that they have since become harmony lads, people who no longer have any occupation except remembering the fight for the teachers' union, or rubbing their hands at the thought of how many climbers they kept out of the study group, or softening up this or that foundation, journal, or other agency of culture-mongering for each other. The sleekness, sunny good humor, and equable spirit of the types in question lend a sly support to this view. So too does the truth that one can read the tough talkers of the thirties in their own vein without finding in the excitement much desperation or sense of risk at all, only a tone of breezy confidence, like that of an elegant young punk knocking over his first candy store.⁴ But if the voice of the thirties, when it is played back to the audience in 1958, seems to patronize and condescend; if it sounds like the voice of an insider who knows what is coming and knows too that it won't hurt *him*, it plainly sounded otherwise at the time. No one can say that Prof. Chase is dead wrong to marvel at the bravery of last year's young, only that he is more certain about the nature of bravery in youth than a skeptic or a thorough malcontent ought to be.

The same difficulties arise in connection with the comment in *The Democratic Vista* about the hopeless future of American letters. We shall never see the like of Hemingway and Faulkner again, says Ralph Headstrong. Correct. *Ca va*. And it is fatuous to think of revising the standard opinion; only a hero—or a young punk—would propose that it makes little sense to mark as the end of the line a mad comic genius, and a writer whose absorption with ways of seeing and saying prevented him from arriving at the kind of subject that would strain to its own life and overpower him. Still, to the eye of an aging malcontent, Headstrong, the critical evaluator, once again appears a shade too easily satisfied by the past. The great twentieth-century explorers—Wolfe, Lewis, Dreiser, Anderson, and the rest—make claims no one else can make; this one discovered the Mississippi, that one the Great Lakes; the other the Gulf of Mexico, and so on. But the writer of the fifties whose effect is to disprove the titans' contention that all these bodies of water were one and the same (namely, the Indian Ocean) is an explorer too, and a man to be highly valued. (Think of the difference between Dreiser's "New York" and Saul Bellow's "upper Broadway hotel.") The kind of mind that finds it worthwhile to interview Hemingway's high school teachers to decide how *The Style* was formed, or to sift the garbage in Faulkner's attic to prove that

⁴ The confidence is lofty rather than breezy in the depression pieces of someone like Edmund Wilson; it is worth noting, too, that even a man as substantial as the Wilson of the present day—substantial enough to be pained by the knowingness of that other time—was unable to erase the tone in question by rewriting. See the preface and notes of *The American Earthquake*.

the whole corpus is an allegory of the resurrection, can be forgiven for deciding that American literature is finished. But Prof. Chase's mind is alive—which is to say, it raises expectations that even the slightest leaning toward cant acutely disappoints.

Disappointment, though, is not the fit final word on his present performance. The always sound, well-spoken, tightly organized book that *The Democratic Vista* should have been (and is not) requires a writer of steady balance and sweet reason—and nowadays such qualities seem only to appear in figures who, once out of the study, enjoy the logrolling of the contemporary scene, look to the New Active Leisure to produce a renaissance, and talk in their restless sleep about *The Real Future Ahead* for the professor. In escaping this hell of character Prof. Chase may not have qualified as the Byron of his own day, but he has established himself as a trueheart, a sayer of dark, subversive truths. The question of interest is: when will His Generation produce another?

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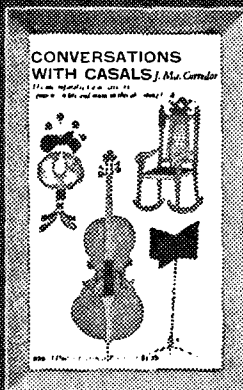
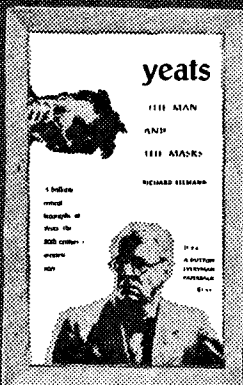
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